# Orders of Succession

Orders of succession are provisions for the assumption of senior department/division leadership positions during an emergency when the incumbents are unable or unavailable to execute their duties. They allow for an orderly and predefined transition of leadership. Developing orders of succession for key positions is intertwined with determining delegation of authority in an emergency.

A comprehensive COOP plan will include an order of succession for *each principal (key) position.* Although orders of succession for these positions within the organization or department are necessary for a comprehensive COOP plan, orders of succession are not limited solely to management positions. All organizations have non-management personnel who, because of their function, are critical to accomplishing the department/division’s goals.

Identify principal positions by the position title and not by the name of the person currently in the position, because different individuals may move through a single position while positions tend to stay the same. However, it is also useful to include the name and contact information underneath each principal position title.

When identifying successors, COOP planners should consider the organizational and geographic proximity of the potential successor to the key position. A potential successor who is part of the same department or division (organizational proximity) is a good choice, because they already have an understanding of the key position. However, make sure that there is at least one successor in the order of succession, who is not located in the same office or facility in case the vacancy is due to a catastrophic event in a particular geographic location.

While the focus should be upon the skills, experience, knowledge, and training necessary for holding a specific principal position, personality, such as a particular individual’s ability to work under pressure, may also be considered. An order of succession also requires sufficient depth. In other words, there may very well need to be more than one or two named successors in most circumstances.

**Essential Functions and Key Positions**

There are a couple of recommended methods that an organization should use to identify key positions.

One method for determining key positions is to question management and staff. Managers should have a strong grasp of their areas of responsibility. Ask them questions such as:

“*What positions in your areas of responsibility are so important that if they suddenly became vacant, your part of the organization would face major problems in achieving your essential functions?*”

Another approach would be to ask staff:

*“In an emergency, would it be necessary for you to be present at the facility to perform your job?”*

As with all delegations of authority questions, focus on position titles, as opposed to the names of persons in these positions.

A second method is to examine historical evidence. An organization that has experienced a crisis in the past that resulted in an unexpected departure by key position incumbents can use evidence of this past event as an indication of where key positions are located. Contact those supervisors who were present during the vacancy to find out which departures posed the greatest problem and why.

Once key positions have been identified, an organization needs to maintain information about these positions. This documentation should be easily accessible via secured physical and remote network access mechanisms. It should also be captured in training materials. For example,

* Who occupies those key positions now?
* What are their qualifications/backgrounds?
* What are the work requirements for key positions?
* Where are the key positions located in the organization?

***Use Worksheet C1 to complete this task.***

**Determine Orders of Succession for each Principal Position**

Once principal positions and personnel have been identified by essential function, determine the order by which those functions and positions would be filled in the absence of the primary executive. Consider the qualifications necessary to perform in the key position and the qualifications of the successor positions, as well as organizational and geographical proximity. The same successors may be named for different key positions, but avoid designating the same successor as the first successor to several key positions. Adopting a wide geographic dispersion of successors, where appropriate, can be an effective control to ensure no disruption in the chain of command.

***Use Form C: Orders of Succession to complete this task.***

### Worksheet C1: IDENTIFY PRINCIPAL POSITIONS

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With the information gathered in FORM A and FORM B identify principal (key) positions for each essential function in the department/division.

| Essential Function | Principal Position(s) |
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### Form C: ORDERS OF SUCCESSION

List orders of succession to key positions critical to the organization’s COOP. Based on previous experience, whenever possible, agencies may choose to investigate options that enable key successors to be geographically dispersed to ensure that succession to office can occur during any type of emergency. Remember orders of succession should run at least THREE DEEP.

| Principle Position | 1st Successor  Name/Position | 2nd Successor Name/Position | 3rd Successor Name/Position |
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