Transition Manual for Newly Elected Mayors

November 27 – 29, 2007

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Distributed at:

Seminar on Transition and Leadership for Newly Elected Mayors
November 27 – 29, 2007

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
John F. Kennedy School of Government

Co-Sponsored by:
The United States Conference of Mayors

Author: Matthew Mayrl
Design: Kevin Curry

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank Bill Purcell, Peter Zimmerman, Benjamin Branham, Dominic Tocci, and Amoretta Morris for their assistance on this report.
Welcome to office and congratulations on your victory! With the election passed, new mayors share a challenge common to all recently elected officials – transitioning from campaigning to governing. Transition periods vary widely from city to city, with some lasting only a few weeks between election and inauguration, while others stretch out several months. Depending on the city size and the resources available for transition, the process and goals will differ from city to city.

Regardless of the differences between cities, entering office and organizing an administration is a hectic time for a newly elected mayor. The Seminar on Transition and Leadership for Newly Elected Mayors seeks to provide a relaxed setting where new mayors can reflect on what they seek to accomplish and how they’re going to do it. This manual is designed to provide all new mayors with insights on how best to focus time and energy during this transition period.

As home to a majority of the country’s population, economic activity and innovative solutions to public challenges, cities and their surrounding metropolitan areas are vital to the future of our country. We hope that this guide and the Seminar on Transition and Leadership for Newly Elected Mayors will advance mayors’ important work, which is so critical to us all.

Congratulations and best wishes,

James A. Leach
Director
Institute of Politics
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. PRIORITIZING
   - Identifying Your Administration’s Priorities
   - Identifying the Resources Needed to Achieve Administration Goals
   - Communicating Your Goals and Priorities

2. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS & SUPPORT
   - Building Support within City Government
   - Creating Ties to Community Leaders Outside of City Government
   - Managing the Media
   - Ensuring Productive Community Relations

3. STAFFING YOUR OFFICE
   - Hiring Key Staff: Chief of Staff and Scheduler
   - Identifying Talented Staff
   - Managing Your Staff for the Long Term

4. ACTIVELY MANAGE YOUR TIME
   - Internal Management
   - External Meetings
   - Media
   - Public Appearances
   - Intergovernmental Relations
PRIORITIZING

The fast-paced world of campaigns bring a wide range of issues into focus. This includes your own policy proposals, the proposals of your opponents, ideas forwarded by local news media, and the success or failure of existing city programs. Simply put, if your administration’s attention is divided among all of these issues, it is likely to achieve measurable success on none. Therefore, it is crucial for newly elected mayors to examine which policies and programs are of greatest importance to their city and administration.

Identifying Your Administration’s Priorities

All mayors enter office having campaigned on a number of key issues. Mayor-elects should take time early in their transition period to lay out all of the goals and promises they have set forth during the campaign. With objectives established, the mayor and his/her staff should go through the list and detail specific strategies the administration will use to achieve these goals. Once this is complete, the mayor and his/her advisors should identify a small set of priorities for the administration that align with the most pressing needs of the city. Identifying priority goals early on will serve to organize the activities, time, and effort of the mayor.

Beyond examining the promises made during their campaign, new mayors should familiarize themselves with the city’s existing programs and organizational structure. New mayors should pay special attention to those programs and initiatives initiated by their predecessors and those that perform core services such as public safety, education, and public works. As mayor, you should identify which of these programs are successful, which programs need to be strengthened, energized or otherwise revamped, and which may be inconsistent......
with your administration’s priorities and need to be scaled back, eliminated or can be more efficiently operated by other means (for example by being folded into another department or agency).

From these two lists, a newly elected mayor will be able to organize the activities of their administration. While identifying priorities, it is important to remain reasonable. Each priority should have an anticipated timeline for completion and, where appropriate, intermediate benchmarks to measure progress. Additionally, each goal should note the amount of the mayor’s time it will require to tackle.

**Identifying the Resources Needed to Achieve Administration Goals**

Once you have compiled a full list of your goals and prioritized those that will receive the greatest attention, it is important to examine what is needed to make these goals a reality. This may be increased community support for work on the issue, attention of key business or community leaders, or further research into the scope of the problem.

The first place to start in assessing the resources available to achieve your goals is the city’s budget. Your city’s budget will either provide the opportunity or the roadblock to advancing that agenda, but in either case a city’s budget reveals the existing priorities of the city. Early in their term, newly elected mayors should gain an in depth knowledge of how resources are currently allocated through the budget and also it is formulated and approved within their city. Mayors should also know how the city’s revenues and expenditures have changed over time and where budget cuts have been made, or surpluses appropriated. Budget cycles differ, as do resources from city to city, so it may be impossible for a newly elected mayor to influence the city’s budget for the upcoming year. Going forward, however, crafting a balanced budget will a primary challenge for nearly every mayor and will provide an opportunity for you to advance our administration’s priorities.

Another key resource which must be divided among your administration’s priorities is the time of staff. Moving your priorities forward requires that someone actively
monitor day-to-day progress on these initiatives. As you review your priorities, it will be important to assess how much staff time is needed for each project and which responsibilities can be delegated among trusted staff members. As you review the priorities for your transition and administration, new mayors should ensure that each priority have a designated point person with adequate time to shepherd the initiative.

A process of cataloguing and prioritizing goals during your transition period will help you to identify gaps in the resources needed to achieve these goals. Recognizing these gaps early allows you to plan upfront for how to acquire or leverage additional resources needed to achieve your goals.

Communicating Your Goals and Priorities

Upon entering office, there is a great deal of pressure on new mayors to quickly announce major changes or new initiatives. It is important for new mayors to communicate their goals and priorities to the public; however, new mayors should not be pressured into announcing major reforms that are not yet fully researched or developed. As you catalogue, prioritize, and map the resources needed to achieve your goals, you should also consider how you are going to communicate these goals, both among staff and the public. New mayors should be mindful of which goals/tactics require further development, which issues are likely to be politically contentious, which reforms will require a great deal of public support to implement, and which constituencies need to be brought into the process to ensure future success. Considering these key issues upfront will help new mayors develop a communications strategy that avoids the premature announcement of undeveloped reforms, while allowing the mayor to communicate effectively on his/her more fully formed ideas.
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS & SUPPORT

Being an effective mayor requires that you take advantage of all resources available in your home community.

Being an effective mayor requires that you take advantage of all resources available in your home community. As noted earlier, there are likely to be resource gaps between what you aim to achieve and what resources are immediately available to you. Filling these gaps is one of the most important tasks for new mayors, as it allows you to achieve progress on your goals and promises. During the early days of your administration, therefore, it is important to transition from a convener of an electoral coalition, to the creator of an effective governing coalition.

The new mayor must to recognize the differences between these two coalitions and start assembling the political resources needed in order to govern effectively. In a campaign, winning coalitions can be formed without drawing from the broad spectrum of groups and interests. But, when it comes to governing, a new mayor must reach out to individuals, interest groups, and community organizations that did not necessarily support their candidacy. These actors control resources – money, time, and support – that are critical to the operations of city government. Moreover, achieving progress on your goals will almost assuredly require the participation or input of some former opponents.

As you begin building your governing coalition, it may be helpful to think of the resources and relationships which need to be built in four general categories: 1) within the government; 2) civic leaders outside of government; 3) the media; and, 4) the community.

Building Support within City Government

Enacting new policies or programs in your home city will require support from government employees – both elected officials and civil servants. You will need support from City Councilors or Alderpersons to pass new ordinances. And, the management of new initiatives
will ultimately fall to department heads. For this reason, it is important for you and your administration to build support among government officials upon entering office.

**City Councilors:** Mayors often times have contentious relationships with the legislative body in their city. In fact, your opponent in the mayor’s race may be a sitting Councilor. Or, depending on the form of government, you may still be a member of the legislative branch. Early in your administration, it is important to establish a good working relationship with the City Council. Mayors should take care to establish lines of communication so that you can make your goals understood and also understand councilors’ goals, with an eye towards finding synergies or being prepared for policy disagreements.

**City Manager & Department Heads:** Depending on your form of government, much of the implementation of your initiatives will fall to the city manager or department heads. In some cases, new mayors will be able to select their own department heads, but regardless of whether this is the case, it is important to establish good working relationships with these individuals. City managers and department heads are likely to have their own set of priorities. New mayors must understand these concerns and generate buy-in for their own priorities among the people who actually manage the day-to-day implementation of key services and new initiatives.

**Superintendent of Schools:** Even if your office has no control over the administration of the local school system, education will always be a top public issue. New mayors should meet with leaders of their school system familiarize themselves with how the system is
governed and the key issues and immediate challenges surrounding education in their community. Because of school systems’ autonomy, it is especially important to build support and trust with these officials if educational improvement is one of your administration’s key priorities.

Union Leaders: Even if you were not supported by the public employees union during your campaign, new mayors need to have a working relationship with the public employees unions in their city. During your time in office, you will likely have to renegotiate a union contract, a process which can be both time consuming and politically contentious. Understanding union priorities upfront will help to improve these negotiations. In addition, any changes you seek to make to government operations will affect the tasks and responsibilities of union-represented city employees. By interfacing with union leadership early on, you will better anticipate any challenges to on-the-ground implementation of your priorities and more quickly build support for (or anticipate pushback against) your new initiatives.

Key City Staff: Depending on what priorities you have outlined, there may be city staffers who are not department heads but who will be integral to making your initiatives successful. New mayors, in conjunction with department heads, should identify these staffers and include them early in program/initiative design. This generates buy-in and ensures that initiatives are structured with better attention to on-the-ground implementation.

Creating Ties to Community Leaders Outside of City Government
Achieving your goals will require a broad range of resources, both inside and outside of City Hall. As you set out priorities for your administration, it is important to recognize when you’ll need outside resources to move a priority forward. To the extent that the following community actors align with your priorities, it is important to consider how to parlay their interest into additional resources.
Achieving your goals will require a broad range of resources, both inside and outside of City Hall. To the extent that the following community actors align with your priorities, it is important to consider how to parlay their interest into additional resources.

*Business/Commerce Associations:* Business and commerce associations can be valuable partners in achieving the goals of your administration. Major businesses within your community have a great interest in the proper functioning of the city and can be influential in building public support for your initiative, sponsoring and funding events, and contributing expertise in business retention and growth. Moreover, the associations to which they belong serve as important forums where concerns are aired and consensus is built.

*Major Non-Profit Institutions:* In many cities, a large portion of the economy activity is generated by nonprofit community, in particular hospitals and universities. They are major employers, purchasers, service providers, and property developers with public missions that often overlap with a mayor’s priorities. New mayors should connect with the leaders of these institutions early in their terms to assess how these institutional resources may be leveraged to achieve the mayor’s goals.

*Philanthropic Community:* Newly elected mayors should build relationships with major philanthropists and local foundations. In addition to being a potential source of financial resources for future policy initiatives, the philanthropic community is often both influential within, and knowledgeable about, the community.
Neighborhood Groups: Neighborhood groups can be very influential within a city and are often the key to success or failure for your initiatives. Building relations with neighborhood groups helps a mayor’s office be more responsive to the needs of the community and helps build support for policy initiatives among community members.

Faith Community: In many areas, the most vibrant source of community engagement is the local church. In addition, churches and other religious organizations often are important service providers of food and housing assistance. New mayors should consciously build relationships with church leaders, as they are an important source of information about community needs and can help to build support behind a mayor’s policy initiatives.

Opinion Leaders: Local opinion leaders can either be a large asset, or a significant impediment, to achieving your goals. After a long campaign, you should know whether these individuals generally supported you as a candidate. Regardless, it is important to build relationships even with those who opposed your candidacy. They can become potential allies on individual policy initiatives you choose to pursue.

Other Elected Officials: Achieving success on many of your priorities will require the cooperation, if not additional support, from other levels of government. Newly elected mayors should schedule time to meet with key officials in county, state, and federal government.

Community-Based Organizations: Community-based organizations play important service-provision roles within many cities and increasingly are performing many of tasks typically thought of as ‘governmental.’ To the extent that your city funds or supports these organizations, it is important to create strong relationships with their leaders. As organizations which directly serve and work with community members, they can become influential partners in enacting your priorities.
Managing the Media

During the transition period, a newly elected mayor must establish a good working relationship with the media. Most members of the press corps—and indeed many of their readers and viewers—view a newly-elected mayor as an unknown quantity. Even if the new mayor has had considerable prior experience in city government and has conducted a focused and issue-oriented campaign, the city’s voters and opinion leaders know that being mayor is different from other political jobs and that campaign promises are, at best, an uncertain guide to an elected official’s actual performance in office.

As a result, especially in cities with large, active, and competitive press corps, there is a tendency to over-report and over-analyze a new mayor’s first weeks and months in office. This is both an opportunity and a challenge. Newly elected mayors must be careful to manage the media, instead of allowing the media to manage them. While there will be pressure on a new mayor to quickly announce his/her staff appointments and major policy initiatives, you should not feel as though you must satisfy this desire. Publicly, you should emphasize the need to get things right and release information on appointments/initiatives only once you and your staff are confident in your decisions.

One step every mayor should take during their transition period, however, is to track incoming calls from the press. Press relations can be soured quickly if reporters see the mayor’s office as being unresponsive. A tracking system ensures that all media calls are answered in a timely fashion by someone on your staff. While you do not need to move your planning at the pace desired by the media, it is important to provide some response to press questions within a relatively short timeframe.

It is just as important to clearly designate those staff persons who are authorized to respond to media inquiries. When press requests go to staff persons that do not typically interact with the media, there should be a system in place whereby they check in with the appropriate staffers (i.e.
press secretary) before speaking to reporters to ensure consistency and clarity of messaging. It is not uncommon for a seemingly innocuous media request to cause negative coverage in the early days of an administration simply because of the lack of an established protocol for responding to calls.

**Ensuring Productive Community Relations**

Many newly elected mayors will have operated campaigns that encouraged active participation from the community. The constraints on your time and focus will drastically increase once in office, and thus it is important to make sure that you have a system that maintains your relationship with the community. Part of this is engaging community leaders as described above. But you should also deliberately plan out how to provide opportunities for constituents to raise concerns and receive updates regarding progress on key campaign promises. During the transition period, new mayors should consider how to use the internet, telecommunications, mailing lists, and public events such as regular town hall meetings in different neighborhoods to ensure that community members have input and information on your administration’s plans and progress.

In addition to keeping the public apprised of your administration’s goals and progress, improving access to basic city services also helps build positive community relations. Most citizens only interact with city government when their car hits a pothole or a neighborhood building is tagged with graffiti. Many mayors have implemented city-service hotlines, such as the City of Chicago’s 311 program, which provides easier access to basic city services. New mayors should consider how improving access to city services factors into their community relations strategy.
STAFFING YOUR OFFICE

New mayors should use the transition period to assess what vacancies need to be filled, which staff may be carried over from the previous administration, and which people are best qualified to fill new positions.

A key challenge for all newly elected mayors is staffing their administration. While some mayors will not have any support staff, most will have positions to fill. New mayors should use the transition period to assess what vacancies need to be filled, which staff may be carried over from the previous administration, and which people are best qualified to fill new positions. Many new mayors retain a substantial number of the department heads and even the personal staff that were appointed by their predecessors. But regardless of whether staff carries over or is newly hired, it is important that all your hires are fully bought in and committed to your goals for the city.

**Hiring Key Staff: Chief of Staff and Scheduler**

Two of the most important positions you will hire are your chief of staff and your scheduler. Your chief of staff will likely serve as your closest advisor and the person responsible for the execution of your agenda. He or she can also serve as the staff director for your operation. A scheduler often serves a gate-keeping function and determines who has access to the mayor and under what circumstances. He or she manages the mayor’s very limited time. The design of your staff operation is complex and there are no easy answers or magic formulas. As a result, it is important for a mayor to resolve these issues in accordance with their own particular needs and personal style. Just as importantly, a mayor must be prepared to change these arrangements if initial decisions fail to work out.

**Identifying Talented Staff**

As new mayors start hiring staff, it is important to seek out the most talented and qualified people for each job. It will be easy to turn to campaign volunteers and staffers to fill positions within your administration, but you should take this opportunity to evaluate all potential hires,
not just who you know. You search should include individuals within the community with expertise on issues that will be centerpieces of your agenda, officials at different levels of government, and leaders of public, private, and non-profit institutions in the region. This process of identifying and recruiting talented people to work for your administration should continue throughout your tenure as mayor.

**Managing Your Staff for the Long Term**

The hectic schedule of a new mayor’s transition may only allow you to focus on immediate hires in the short term. As you settle into office, however, it is important to identify and support talented staffers who can mature into leadership roles over the long term, both inside and outside your administration. The departure of a key staff member can significantly set back progress on achieving your goals, so mayors must always think about which persons can fill in and continue moving their goals forward.

At a broader level, mayors should make an effort to develop systems that recruit and invest in promising young workers. In the coming years, governments nationwide will be experiencing workforce shortages as the baby boomer generation enters retirement. As stewards of their home cities’ futures, mayors should try to consciously identify promising young leaders throughout city government and put them in positions to succeed. Examples of successful programs include summer internships or fellowships that employ local college students, either paid or unpaid. Beyond giving young persons direct exposure to the workings of government, their experience can be coupled with regular seminars and outings/events that build camaraderie among the group and inject departments with fresh enthusiasm.
ACTIVELY MANAGE YOUR TIME

Mayors who do not actively manage their time are likely to fill their time with an uncoordinated slate of events, speaking invitations, group meetings, and press interviews.

Your most precious resource during the transition, and throughout your time in office, is your time. As mayor, you will undoubtedly have endless demands on your time, but it is important to remember what events, interviews, or meetings you choose to attend will affect what gets accomplished during your time in office. Mayors who do not actively manage their time are likely to fill their time with an uncoordinated slate of events, speaking invitations, group meetings, and press interviews.

Soon after getting elected, new mayors should examine how they will divide their time among different tasks and how each of these tasks will fit into the administration’s priorities. In doing so, it may be helpful to consider how you plan to allocate your time among the following general categories:

Internal Management: New mayors should consider how they will manage their own staff. A number of mayors across the country are becoming more actively engaged in the management of city staff through ‘Stat’ programs modeled on Baltimore’s successful CitiStat program. As you take office, you should consider how you will manage your own staff, whether or not you will be active in the management of other city staff through performance measurement indicators, and how this will fit into your schedule.

External Meetings: As mayor, you will be invited to participate in an overwhelming number of community meetings and serve on a wide range of committees and task forces. New mayors should carefully consider which external meetings are related to and imperative to achieving their goals and prioritize participation in those meetings accordingly.

Media: As noted earlier, mayors must actively manage their relationships with the
media. This should include setting aside some time in your schedule to work with the media, but structuring these events so that they emphasize key issues areas or administration priorities.

Public Appearances: In the early days of your administration, it will be tempting to attend every public appearance to which you are invited. But it is important to remember that time spent at each public appearance is time not spent actually governing the city. New mayors should not feel obligated to attend every public event to which they are invited. Keep a public presence, but choose your appearances strategically.

Intergovernmental Relations: While new mayors may have a flood of time demands in the other categories listed here, intergovernmental relation functions are less likely to overwhelm your scheduler. However, time spent on intergovernmental relations can be just as important to the success of your administration. New mayors whose priorities fall in policy areas with significant overlap in governing authority should devote time to meetings and events that will build productive intergovernmental relations.