Steps in Flexible Model of Succession Planning
With highlights of measurement components

1. **Pre-plan.** This step has several components, which include creating a succession planning team, establishing program objectives, establishing measures of success, establishing program design, and developing an implementation plan.

2. **Identify Leadership Characteristics.** Particular emphasis is placed upon the concepts of leadership levels, the demands of each level, and capacity to meet those demands. Each is discussed in terms of competencies and results required of each leadership level. Because leadership is multilevel, different leadership characteristics are needed in order to successfully perform at each level. In this step, three leadership characteristics are identified for each leadership level: competency levels, competency scope of impact, and leadership results. The intensity and impact dimensions of competencies are introduced, and their assessment is explored. A measure of “balanced leadership results” is presented. These characteristics are used as the basis for assessing, developing, and selecting future leaders. The importance of leadership competency models and their use in assessing candidates’ match to the demands of leadership is addressed.

3. **Assess Bench Strength and other Pre-Measures.** The concept of bench strength is presented, and its importance as both a primary goal and an assessment of succession planning validity is discussed. Bench strength is defined as the number of critical leadership positions that have at least one person ready to successfully assume the role and responsibilities of each of these positions. Bench strength assessments can serve as a baseline measure of an organization’s ability to fill positions from within. In such cases, organizations evaluate the effectiveness of a succession planning program by comparing the number of positions that have someone ready to successfully move into them before and after implementation of the succession planning program. Other pre- and post-measures of succession planning success are suggested.

4. **Communicate Plan.** Inform stakeholders about the purpose and value of succession planning and the objectives and specific contents of the agency’s program. The sub-steps include determining communication goals and measures, identifying target audiences, and determining communication methods.

5. **Assess Talent.** The identification of leadership potential and its measurement is explored in detail. The tutorial introduces “the potential-results matrix” and demonstrates its use in differentiating leadership talent and identifying high potential. This step involves assessing employees on multiple dimensions and comparing them with successful characteristics that have been determined to be associated with a specific leadership level. The results of these assessments provide useful information regarding employees’ potential to take on greater leadership responsibilities and their strengths and areas for development. Employees who demonstrate appropriate competency levels, scope of impact, and a history of getting successful results are identified as having high potential and may be selected to participate in a structured set of activities to rapidly prepare them for higher leadership positions.
6. **Develop Talent.** In this step, development strategies are outlined for members of the succession planning pool based upon the results of the assessment in the previous step. Development strategies for each member of the pool should be based on information gathered during the talent assessment process. The potential-results matrix is converted into a “development matrix”, and its implications for structuring developmental actions are illustrated. The relative value of various developmental methods is compared, and methods for identifying priority developmental assignments are shared. Different approaches to development may be necessary to address issues related to competency levels versus issues related to scope of impact or results. Although many strategies are available to develop employees, the key is to identify the right combination of strategies that prepares them to successfully take on higher leadership roles within the organization. Effective in developing future leaders are key assignments, developmental feedback, mentoring, coaching, formal classroom training, and professional membership. The pivotal importance of key assignments, their identification, and the removal of blocks to key assignments are emphasized.

7. **Evaluate Succession Planning.** This step involves measuring the impact of the succession planning program upon established objectives. After sufficient time following implementation, program processes and results should be periodically reviewed to assess whether program objectives have been achieved and to identify areas for improvement. Once the evaluation has been completed, modifications to the program should be made as appropriate. There are many approaches to program evaluation, which vary in complexity. Measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of programs may range from simple methods such as an assessment of stakeholder satisfaction to more sophisticated processes, such as a return on investment or cost-benefit analysis.