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In The Interim // Information for People who Influence Museums

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Welcome to the first e-newsletter of Interim Museum Services LLC.

Four of us, all having served as interim directors and all with many years of involvement in various museums, have focused on a sometimes overlooked issue of museum governance: succession planning and interim directorships.

We have recruited a cadre of very experienced museum directors, chief operating officers and interim directors, able and interested in providing counsel on succession or step-in on short notice, as Interim Directors, to maintain the momentum of a museum.

We hope that the museum community will come to rely on us, as individuals have come to depend on estate planners and 911.

Katrina Crisis Changes IMS Interim Director's Priorities

When Katrina hit, the Louisiana State Museum's Interim Director Carma Fauntleroy had been in her New Orleans position only four days.

Interim Museum Services LLC had responded within two weeks to a request to fill the position, and Fauntleroy, an experienced Interim Director, had been approved both by Angèle Davis, Louisiana Secretary of Culture, Recreation and Tourism (under the auspices of Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu) and the citizen board (then chaired by Audubon Nature Institute President Ron Forman).

The Louisiana State Museum is a 5-city system of 14 historic sites with an annual budget of six million dollars. Pre-Katrina visitorship numbered over 300,000, comprised primarily of attendance at its five museum properties in New Orleans.

When Fauntleroy assumed her four-month responsibilities as both Interim Director and Assistant Secretary of the Department, her priorities were clear. The search process for permanent Director was underway and five candidates had been identified; she was to coordinate the search firm and candidates with the decision makers. A recent museum assessment had recommended significant changes in governance structure, programming, and resource development; Fauntleroy was to facilitate public hearings, guide the decision makers toward consensus and commence implementation. Finally, the Interim Director was expected to open a new museum facility in Baton Rouge with a celebratory gala to kick off the 2006 Centennial of the State Museum system. Then Katrina struck!

Fauntleroy was evacuated to Baton Rouge where the Department Secretary graciously shared her residence. A week after Katrina, only 50% of more than 100 employees could return to work, due to massive displacement across the country and, for those closer to home, the need to salvage personal property. There was only modest to moderate damage to the New Orleans facilities, with the glaring exception of the Old U.S. Mint, which lost 2/3 of its roof during the storm. The water that entered affected a very small percentage of collection documents that, subsequently, were freeze-dried to save them.

The Interim Director's role was completely redefined by Katrina. Portions of the Baton Rouge facility were transformed into an emergency shelter. Housing and medical needs for staff members and their families had to be found. Another museum facility became a county distribution center for relief supplies. Collections in the U.S. Mint had to be moved to 20,000 square feet of temporary storage space.

Public hearings on the many recommended changes were officially delayed until after the recovery and the arrival of the permanent Executive Director. Faced with suddenly scarce resources, the Department recommitted itself to a new outcome-based budgeting process initiated pre-Katrina; Fauntleroy was tasked with producing the museum's first outcome-based budget as a member of the with Department's executive management team.

Amazingly, the Cabildo in New Orleans, where the Louisiana Purchase was signed, was re-opened in October; and the new 70,000 square foot museum in Baton Rouge was inaugurated February 1.

Besides the complete change from Fauntleroy's anticipated responsibilities, the final ironic twist in her assignment was that both the chair of the citizen board and the Lieutenant Governor announced that they were candidates for Mayor of New Orleans. Seven months after she began her four-month tour, Fauntleroy, Interim Museum Services' first placement, was pleased that the permanent Executive Director accepted his appointment and would arrive in 60 days.

Museum Dilemma: Interim Directors from Inside or Outside?

The average tenure for Executive Directors of non-profits is about five years and over 70% of executive transitions are non-routine. Clearly, museum boards must give high priority to the continuity of professional leadership for their institution.

Continuity requires both planning for succession and being ready for an unanticipated departure.

Too often, when an Executive Director departs there is a leadership vacuum. The Board and staff have to focus on defining the museum's requirements for the next Director and keeping the museum from stalling in the interim. Frequently, museums will turn to an existing staff person to step in as the Interim Director, while a search firm commences its work. The obvious advantage of an internal person is familiarity with the museum and its constituents. But this route has many liabilities and the other option, hiring an outside professional, has many advantages.

What are the advantages of calling on an outside Interim Director (OID)?

OIDs bring and provide objectivity.

OIDs have many previous professional museum experiences, which they bring to bear on their tenure.

OIDs have viewed museums, not from a narrow departmental perspective, but from many perspectives, including from the top.

OIDs are not candidates for the permanent Executive Director position; they can resolve problems, personnel and others that those with a longer employment interest would find difficult; they are not entwined in the politics of the organization.

Internal staff, if elevated temporarily, may, later, find it impossible to surrender authority, leading to the subsequent loss of yet another key staff person in the organization.

OIDs provide a new perspective, as well as candid feedback to Boards.

OIDs can ameliorate internal tensions, as they are not a part of the political environment.

OIDs can provide specific skills, e.g. financial, human relations that are needed.

OIDs can be selected either to keep a museum moving or to orchestrate change.

OIDs can provide Boards with candid assessment of their own operations.

OIDs permit search firms to conduct their searches in a constructive, less hurried manner than if an internal person were doing two jobs.

The right OID can turn-around or significantly strengthen a poorly operating museum.

OIDs can help coordinate the search and prepare the new Executive Director.

Interim Museum Services can assist Museum Boards, whether the need is to locate an experienced Interim Director or counseling for board and staff during an executive transition.

With a roster of almost 50 experienced Directors, IMS responds to requests for Interim Directors in a few weeks, providing museums with both stability and forward momentum.

A Resource for Museum Executive Transitions

In the Interim will occasionally suggest books and articles useful to those who govern museums. Such is a book published by the [Museum Trustee Association](#).

An Executive transition is a process, not just a single decision to hire a new Museum Director. In *Executive Transitions*, one publication in the Museum Trustee Association's series of *Templates for Trustees*, authors Daryl Fischer and Colleen Boland create a 180-day timeline, or critical path, that guides trustees through a variety of decisions and actions.

The book lists several major stages and steps in the process:

- Planning and Budgeting
- Forming the Search Committee
- Conducting the Institutional Assessment
- Defining the Winning Position
- Assessing the Candidates
- Sealing the Deal
- Orientation and Introductions
- Measuring Progress

Each step has a series of actions. One of those forty-five actions, for example, is "Executive Committee establishes interim leadership plan."

The MTA book points out the difference in the process, depending on whether the departing Director has left abruptly, resigned or retired. It defines the information that, ideally, the departing Director should prepare - from lease renewal dates to performance reviews to a list of key stakeholders.

The floppy disc that accompanies the 140-page written manual includes a dozen electronic templates that can be used directly and customized by each museum, such as a search budget, an interview outline, a commitment letter, an institutional assessment, and a job description.

While every transition is unique, this book and disc, available from the [MTA](#), provide museums with an overall understanding of the process and the essential tools to accomplish the task successfully.

IMS at AAM

Look for us in Boston, April 28-30, booth 722. We will, again, be at the Museum Expo of the American Association of Museums Annual Meeting.

Offices in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

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