

Navigating Government Administrative Leadership Changes

A practical continuity guide for registrars and vital records leaders

Election Changes Are Coming

This November's election season could bring changes in governors, agency leaders and other elected or appointed officials — but leadership turnover in vital records is rarely limited to election cycles. Whether the change comes from an election, an appointment, or ordinary staff transition, new administrations may introduce different priorities, decision-makers and expectations. The goal is to prepare incoming leaders with a clear understanding of the vital records office's core mission, essential services, operational impact and current priorities.

Protect Essential Functions Before the Transition

Use this tip sheet to preserve institutional knowledge, distinguish statutory obligations from discretionary initiatives, and give new leaders a clear path to informed decisions while maintaining reliable service to the public.



CLARITY

Summarize the core mission, responsibilities, priorities and leadership needs.



CONTINUITY

Document ownership, essential processes, dependencies and backup contacts.



CREDIBILITY

Use operational data, service outcomes and transparent risk reporting.

Establish Clarity: Define the Mission and Priorities

1

Build a one-page core mission and priorities brief

Create a leadership-ready "Vital Records 101" summary that explains what the office does, why its work is essential and where leadership attention is needed — whether that leadership is a newly appointed governor or a new department director, a new state health officer, or any newly elected government official.

- ✓ Describe core responsibilities, including registration, issuance, amendments, data stewardship and partner support.
- ✓ Summarize current priorities and initiatives without technical overload.
- ✓ Identify immediate decisions, risks or resources that require leadership awareness.

2

Align priorities without restarting essential work

Expect incoming leaders to ask different questions. Reintroduce the office through its mission, public impact, current priorities and areas where leadership direction is needed.

- ✓ Offer a short briefing focused on responsibilities, outcomes, risks and immediate priorities.
- ✓ Present choices and tradeoffs in plain language.
- ✓ Confirm priorities, decisions and ownership in writing after each leadership briefing.

Build Continuity: Preserve Knowledge and Coverage

3

Create a transition-ready leadership record

Incoming leaders should be able to understand the office's statutory responsibilities, priorities and major decisions without reconstructing the history themselves.

- ✓ Summarize current initiatives, key decisions and unresolved issues.
- ✓ Separate established operational responsibilities from items requiring new leadership direction.
- ✓ Keep supporting materials current, accessible and written in plain language.

4

Map stakeholders and strengthen backup coverage

Leadership turnover can expose single points of failure. Build relationships across program, information technology, legal, procurement, finance, communications and external partners so essential work is not dependent on one person.

- ✓ Name a primary and secondary backup for every critical responsibility.
- ✓ Record who approves, who advises and who needs regular updates.
- ✓ Prepare a short onboarding path for newly appointed leaders and staff.

Establish Credibility: Protect and Communicate Value

5

Protect essential services and priority initiatives

Identify the critical systems, services and initiatives that must continue during the transition. Focus leadership education on public impact, operational risk and the reason each priority matters.

- ✓ Demonstrate value with operational data — prior-year registrations, issuances, amendments and service/turnaround measures, with context.
- ✓ Clarify which activities are time-sensitive, legally required or essential to residents and partners.
- ✓ Explain the service impact of delay or disruption without providing unnecessary implementation detail.
- ✓ Reinforce the office's statutory duties— this is often the first thing new leadership will ask about.
- ✓ Escalate only the decisions that require leadership action.

6

Communicate visible service impact

Demonstrate how the office supports residents, public health, identity and eligibility processes, and government partners. Use clear outcomes rather than implementation details.

- ✓ Connect priorities to statutory requirements, accurate and timely records, dependable service and trusted data.
- ✓ Share concise examples or measures that demonstrate public and partner impact.
- ✓ Distinguish ongoing essential work from new requests or commitments.

Questions New Leaders Are Likely to Ask

What does Vital Records do? Explain the office's core responsibilities, customers, partners and role in maintaining accurate, secure and accessible records.

Why is this work essential? Connect the office's services to residents, public health, identity and eligibility processes, and government operations.

What is the scope of the work? Use registration, issuance, amendment, customer service and other operational measures to demonstrate volume and impact.

What are the current priorities and risks? Summarize the most important operational needs and initiatives, including the public or partner impact of delay or disruption.

What do you need from me? Request one clear decision, endorsement, resource or escalation at a time.

BOTTOM LINE

The strongest transition plan makes critical vital records functions and initiatives understandable, defensible and easy to continue. Preserve the record, protect the critical path and give new leaders clear choices so the agency can adapt without starting over.

