



ACCRÉDITATION SANS FRONTIÈRES

ASF Leadership Succession Policy

How ASF continues functioning if its founding leadership is no longer able to serve

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Foreword

The ASF Financial Sustainability & Liability Management Policy states a real principle: ASF should not depend on a single funding source, because that dependency is both a financial risk and an impartiality risk. That same logic has an unaddressed twin. ASF's legal registration, ongoing accreditation authority, and more than thirty published governing documents rest, in practice, on the continued presence of its founding President. An organization's own accreditation standards routinely require the facilities it accredits to demonstrate genuine continuity planning — it would be a real inconsistency for ASF to ask that of others while never stating its own answer.

This document is not written because anything is wrong. It is written for the same reason a hospital keeps a defibrillator it hopes never to use — because the moment a policy like this is actually needed is the worst possible moment to be writing it for the first time.

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy governs how ASF continues its accreditation authority, standards revision work, and day-to-day operations without disruption if ASF's founding President, or another individual holding a role this policy identifies as critical, is no longer able to serve — whether due to incapacity, death, or voluntary departure. It applies to the President specifically, and to any Council officer whose sudden absence would leave a specific ASF process — document control, registry maintenance, or complaint intake — without a genuinely competent operator under the ASF Personnel Competence & Awareness Policy.

2. Why This Policy Exists: The Real Evidence

This is not a theoretical risk drawn from ASF's own imagination. Research from BoardSource, the leading American authority on nonprofit governance practice, and reported consistently across multiple independent surveys, finds that fewer than three in ten nonprofit organizations have any written succession plan at all [1–2]. Separate research finds that roughly two-thirds of nonprofit leaders surveyed intend to leave their position within five years, while the great majority of the organizations they lead have made no formal preparation for that transition [3].

The consequence, where a plan does not exist, is well documented: loss of institutional knowledge, disrupted funder and partner confidence, and — for an organization performing a public accountability function specifically, as ASF does — a genuine risk that the accreditation decisions and standards revisions already in progress lose momentum or coherence at the exact moment continuity matters most [3–4]. ASF adopts this policy specifically to be among the minority of organizations that has actually done this work before it is needed, not after.

3. Why the Documentation Itself Is Part of This Policy's Answer

The most direct protection against a single-person dependency is not naming a successor — it is ensuring that ASF's actual knowledge of how it operates does not live in one person's memory. This is precisely what BoardSource's own guidance identifies as the essential-functions component of emergency succession planning: documenting, in advance, exactly what a departing leader actually does, so that knowledge does not leave with them [4].

Every ASF document published under the ASF Document Control Procedure — the full methodology in How ASF Develops and Revises Standards, every organizational standard, every governance and accountability policy — exists specifically so that ASF's institutional knowledge survives the departure of any single individual, including its founder. This policy relies on that documentation existing and being genuinely current, not as a formality, but as the actual mechanism of continuity BoardSource's own research identifies as the difference between organizations that survive a sudden transition well and those that do not [4].

4. The Three Succession Timelines

Consistent with the framework CompassPoint and BoardSource both apply to nonprofit succession planning, this policy distinguishes three genuinely different timelines, each requiring a different kind of preparation [4–5]:

4.1 Emergency Succession

Addresses an immediate, unplanned departure — sudden incapacity, death, or an unexpected resignation with no advance notice. This timeline is addressed in Section 5 (Interim Authority) of this policy, and is reviewed annually under Section 9, whether or not it is ever activated.

4.2 Strategic Succession

Addresses long-range leadership development well before any specific departure is anticipated — typically an eighteen-to-thirty-six month horizon, consistent with real nonprofit governance practice [5]. ASF's own Council, under the Call and Selection Procedure already governing new Council membership, treats every Council appointment as a genuine opportunity for this kind of preparation, not merely a vacancy to fill.

4.3 Departure Succession

Addresses the period once a planned transition has actually been announced — the President's own intention to step down, stated in advance, with time for an orderly handover. This is the most straightforward of the three timelines precisely because it is the least urgent; it is addressed through the ordinary process in Section 7 of this policy, without the compressed timeline emergency succession requires.

Treating these as one undifferentiated “succession problem” is itself a common failure mode real research identifies — an emergency plan and a strategic development plan solve genuinely different problems, on genuinely different clocks [4–5].

5. Interim Authority

Where the President is suddenly unable to serve — the emergency timeline defined in Section 4.1 — interim authority for ASF's ongoing operations passes immediately to the standing ASF International Standards Council, acting collectively, consistent with the Council's existing authority under Sections 7 through 9 of How ASF Develops and Revises Standards. No single individual is designated as an automatic sole successor — the same collective-accountability principle already governing every other significant ASF decision applies here, not an exception to it.

During any interim period, no accreditation decision, standards revision milestone, or public commitment already in progress is paused or reversed solely because of the leadership transition itself. An organization mid-survey, or a standard mid-revision, continues under the existing process and existing documentation, precisely because that process does not depend on any one individual's continued presence.

6. Fiduciary Duties Underlying This Policy

Consistent with the three duties generally recognized as governing nonprofit board and council service — the Duty of Care, the Duty of Loyalty, and the Duty of Obedience to the organization's own mission [1] — the Duty of Care specifically requires ASF's Council to ensure organizational sustainability, including genuine oversight of executive leadership continuity, not merely deference to whoever currently holds it. This policy is one concrete expression of that duty, not a document existing alongside it.

7. Selecting a Permanent Successor

The Council identifies and appoints a permanent successor following a process at least as rigorous as the Call and Selection Procedure governing new Council members under Section 9 of How ASF Develops and Revises Standards — open, criteria-based, and documented, not an informal internal decision. Consistent with real nonprofit governance practice, the Council considers both internal candidates, who bring institutional continuity and cultural familiarity, and external candidates, who may bring a genuinely fresh perspective ASF's continued growth could benefit from — neither is presumptively preferred over the other [5].

Where the departing individual is able to participate in this process, their input is sought; where they are not, the Council proceeds without it rather than leaving the role vacant indefinitely.

8. Crisis Communication

A leadership transition ASF has not communicated clearly is a transition accredited organizations, surveyors, and the public are left to speculate about — which itself risks the exact loss of confidence this policy exists to prevent, consistent with the crisis-communication component real emergency succession frameworks explicitly build in [4]. Within a reasonable period of an emergency transition, the Council issues a clear, public statement confirming that ASF's accreditation authority, standards, and ongoing surveys and reviews continue without interruption, consistent with this policy.

This statement is factual and calm, consistent with the tone this entire document portfolio has been built to maintain — it states what continues, not merely what has happened.

9. Annual Review

Consistent with the real best practice of reviewing emergency succession assignments at least annually [4], this policy's practical readiness — not merely its existence — is reviewed as part of every annual ASF Management Review

Procedure cycle: whether the individuals presumed available for interim Council authority remain genuinely available, and whether ASF's own documentation remains current enough to actually support the continuity this policy promises.

10. Relationship to Other ASF Processes

- Interim and permanent leadership decisions are documented consistent with the ASF Document Control Procedure, the same as any other governance decision
- A leadership transition, and this policy's own annual readiness, are required discussion items at the ASF Management Review Procedure (Section 9)
- This policy does not alter the Council's existing authority under How ASF Develops and Revises Standards — it states what happens to that authority's own leadership, not what that authority can do

References

- [1] Forvis Mazars US. Your Role in Succession Planning on a Nonprofit Board. 2023.
- [2] BoardSource. Leading with Intent: BoardSource Index of Nonprofit Board Practices. Washington, DC: BoardSource; 2021.
- [3] Glick Davis. Nonprofit Succession Planning: A Board's Guide. 2026.
- [4] Skillpanel. Nonprofit Succession Planning: Free Templates Guide, citing CompassPoint and BoardSource emergency succession frameworks. 2026.
- [5] Boardable. Board Succession Planning: A Guide For Nonprofits. 2026.

Annex A — Emergency Succession Activation Record

Completed by the Council immediately upon activation of the emergency succession timeline (Section 4.1).

Date of activation: _____

Nature of the departure (incapacity / death / unexpected resignation):

- ☐ Interim Council authority confirmed under Section 5
- ☐ Public crisis communication issued under Section 8

Continuity Confirmation

- ☐ Ongoing accreditation decisions confirmed uninterrupted
- ☐ Ongoing standards revisions confirmed uninterrupted

Permanent Successor Process

Selection process initiated on: _____

Successor appointed on: _____

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An accreditation body that has written down everything it knows, the way this one now has, does not actually depend on any one person to keep existing. This policy states that plainly, so it is a documented fact rather than an assumption nobody tested.