

Transition Process

Every election brings a new look to state legislatures. New members are elected, and new staff are hired. Sometimes the character of a chamber is redefined when a new leader is selected. Probably the most significant change occurs when party control switches. This section focuses on major transitions within a chamber, such as those brought about by the selection of new leaders or a switch in partisan control.

Use of transition processes. Most legislative chambers do not have a formal process by which transitions are run. In fact, only two chambers—the Kansas Senate and Maine House—reported that they use formal transition processes (see table 00-2.45). Thirty-nine legislative bodies indicated that they use an informal transition process. Fifty-one legislative assemblies do not have transition procedures.

Benefits of transitional processes. Table 00-2.26 shows that many chambers consider a transition process to be beneficial. A transition process can strengthen the legislative institution, improve leader and member understanding of the legislative process, improve the chamber's use of time, and reduce anxiety among members and staff.

The lack of a transition process may reflect the mentality that “We have the majority and we're not going to lose it, so why go to the work of setting up a transition process.” Unfortunately, this approach often wastes one of the legislature's most valuable commodities when a transition is necessary—time.

Establishing a transition process. A transition process may be formal or informal. It may be quite detailed or relatively simple. A formal transition process may be established by rule or statute. An informal process may include only a checklist for the new leaders. In whatever form it takes, a transition process is designed to streamline the changeover that must be made within the legislature and to clarify the roles and duties of members and staff who are in new positions.

When creating a transition process, chambers should consider the following.

- Put institutional procedures in writing. For example, prepare a transition manual that explains the powers and responsibilities of leaders, proper protocol, how leadership and member offices are organized and transferred, how committee assignments and bill referrals are made, and how committees are run.
- Create training programs for new leaders, committee chairs, members and staff.
- Identify the key internal and external resources that are available.

Tables 00.2-47 and 00-2.48 illustrate what chambers include in their transition processes.

Other tips to smooth a transition. Legislators and staff who have faced leadership and party switches can be key advisors when shaping transition procedures. A panel of such individuals—brought together for two NCSL programs several years ago—offered the following advice.

Institutional integrity. The chamber's integrity should be maintained throughout the transition. Members and staff should make the legislature look good in the eyes of the voters and taxpayers of the state. During transition, it is especially important that leaders make sure the people's business continues and that gridlock does not occur. Leaders should:

- Acknowledge that transition is a difficult time for everyone involved. Recognize that members and staff will need to change their frames of mind. A legislator's mindset changes depending on whether he or she is in the majority or minority and whether he or she is a leader or member.
- Encourage cooperation among leaders. Have meetings. Understand each other's role. Use good judgement.
- Minimize partisanship. Partisanship stands in the way of a smooth transition. Distinguish the difference between politics and policy. Communicate policy.

Time. Time is a major factor, so it should be used carefully and wisely. Most legislatures have only about two months from election day until the opening of session. Legislatures should:

- Develop a realistic timeline for the transition. Remember that the physical transition of offices, telephones, computers, furniture, etc. requires time, planning and probably money.
- Provide written notice about decisions concerning schedules, physical moves, and hiring/firing.

Plan ahead. Early planning is the key to efficiency. Political parties can begin to plan years or months in advance. This plan should reflect a serious, thoughtful look at what should be done if partisan control switches. A plan facilitates the difficult task of handling the press, and it helps the new leader and majority party appear competent in the eyes of the public. Political parties should:

- Know the requirements. Find out what powers, duties and responsibilities are established by constitution, statute or chamber rule.
- Think about what committees are needed and who might be committee chair. Train committee chairs early so they can be as effective as possible from the beginning.
- Consider what changes should be made to staff organization or to the chamber rules.

Staff. Staff should be viewed and treated as people and as professionals. Many have devoted years to the legislature. They are valuable resources for institutional knowledge. Legislatures should:

- Communicate with the staff. Let them know what to expect and avoid surprises. Early communication from new leadership not only reduces staff anxiety, but it also helps maintain work flow.
- Have a core, nonpartisan staff upon which to rely for support.

Training. Training programs make an effective session possible. Legislatures should provide a strong orientation program and training for new leaders, committee chairs, members and staff.

Table 00-2.45 Use of a Transition Process**The following chambers follow a formal transition process.**

Kansas Senate	Maine House
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The following chambers use an informal transition process.

Alabama Senate	Minnesota House
Arizona Senate and House	Missouri House
Arkansas House	Montana Senate and House
California Senate and Assembly	New Hampshire House
Colorado Senate	Ohio Senate and House
Connecticut Senate	Oklahoma House
Florida Senate and House	Oregon House
Georgia Senate	Pennsylvania House
Hawaii House	Rhode Island House
Idaho Senate	South Dakota Senate and House
Indiana House	Utah Senate and House
Iowa Senate	Virginia House
Kansas House	Washington Senate and House
Louisiana Senate	Wisconsin Senate and Assembly
Michigan Senate	District of Columbia Council

The following chambers have no transition process in place.

Alaska Senate and House	Missouri Senate
Arkansas Senate	Nebraska Senate
Colorado House	Nevada Senate and Assembly
Connecticut House	New Hampshire Senate
Delaware House	New Mexico Senate and House
Georgia House	New York Assembly
Hawaii Senate	North Carolina Senate and House
Idaho Senate	North Dakota Senate and House
Illinois Senate and House	Oklahoma Senate
Indiana Senate	Oregon Senate
Iowa House	Pennsylvania Senate
Kentucky Senate and House	South Carolina Senate and House
Louisiana House	Tennessee Senate and House
Maine Senate	Texas Senate and House
Maryland Senate and House	Vermont Senate
Massachusetts Senate and House	Virginia Senate
Michigan House	West Virginia Senate and House
Minnesota Senate	Wyoming Senate and House
Mississippi House	

Table 00-2.46 Benefits of a Transition Process

State (1)	Strengthens the legislative institution	Improves public perception	Improves leader and member understanding	Minimizes partisanship	Encourages cooperation	Improves the use of time	Reduces anxiety among members and staff	Other
Alabama								
Alaska								
Arizona	B		B		B	B	S	
Arkansas								
California	H		H		H	B	B	
Colorado	S	S	S					
Connecticut	S		S					
Delaware								
Florida	B	H	B	S	B	B	B	
Georgia	S		S			S	S	
Hawaii	H		H		H		H	
Idaho			H		H		H	
Illinois								
Indiana	H				H			
Iowa	S		S			S	S	
Kansas	B		S		S	B	S	
Kentucky			S		S	S	S	
Louisiana	S	S	S		S	S	S	
Maine	H		H		H	H	H	
Maryland								
Massachusetts								
Michigan	S		S		S	S	S	2
Minnesota	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	
Mississippi								
Missouri								
Montana	B		B			B	B	3

Table 00-2.46 Benefits of a Transition Process, cont'd.

State (1)	Strengthens the legislative institution	Improves public perception	Improves leader and member understanding	Minimizes partisanship	Encourages cooperation	Improves the use of time	Reduces anxiety among members and staff	Other
Nebraska								
Nevada								
New Hampshire			H		H			
New Jersey								
New Mexico								
New York								
North Carolina								
North Dakota								
Ohio	S		B	H		B	B	
Oklahoma	H		H			H		
Oregon	H	H	H				H	
Pennsylvania								
Rhode Island	H	H	H					
South Carolina								
South Dakota								
Tennessee								
Texas								
Utah	H	H	B	H	B	H	B	
Vermont								
Virginia	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	
Washington	S		S		S		S	
West Virginia								
Wisconsin	B	S	B		H	H	B	
Wyoming								
District of Columbia			S					

Table 00-2.46 Benefits of a Transition Process, cont'd.

Key:

S=Senate

H=House or Assembly

B=Both chambers

Notes:

1. The following chambers did not return a survey: Alabama House, Delaware Senate, Mississippi Senate, New Jersey Senate and General Assembly, New York Senate, Rhode Island Senate, Vermont House, American Samoa Senate and House, Guam Senate, Northern Mariana Islands Senate and House, Puerto Rico Senate and House, and Virgin Islands Senate.
2. Michigan: For the Senate, a transition instills continuity of the legislative process.
3. Montana: For the Senate and House, a transition process improves efficiency in the face of term limits.

Table 00-2.47 Transition Processes

State (1)	General checklist for new leaders	Timeline for physical transfer of offices, etc.	Examples of written notices for physical transfers	Procedures for physical transfers	Timeline for hiring/firing staff	Examples of written notices for hiring/firing	Procedures for hiring/firing staff	Training programs for new leaders	Training programs for new committee chairs	Training programs for new members	Training programs for new staff
Alabama											
Alaska											
Arizona	H	B	H	H	H		H		H	B	H
Arkansas		H									
California		B			S		S	H	H	H	B
Colorado	S							S		S	
Connecticut		S						S			S
Delaware											
Florida	H	S		S	H		S	B	B	B	B
Georgia	S	S		S				S		S	
Hawaii		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
Idaho	H	H			H						
Illinois											
Indiana		H									
Iowa	S	S		S		S	S	S	S	S	S
Kansas	H								H	B	
Kentucky											
Louisiana	S	S		S						S	S
Maine	H	H					H		H	H	
Maryland											
Massachusetts											
Michigan	S	S	S	S						S	S
Minnesota		H		H	H		H	H	H	H	H
Mississippi											
Missouri											
Montana								B	B	B	B

Table 00-2.47 Transition Processes, cont'd.

State (1)	General checklist for new leaders	Timeline for physical transfer of offices, etc.	Examples of written notices for physical transfers	Procedures for physical transfers	Timeline for hiring/firing staff	Examples of written notices for hiring/firing	Procedures for hiring/firing staff	Training programs for new leaders	Training programs for new committee chairs	Training programs for new members	Training programs for new staff
Nebraska											
Nevada											
New Hampshire									H	H	
New Jersey											
New Mexico											
New York											
North Carolina											
North Dakota											
Ohio	H	S						S	B	H	S
Oklahoma	H	H					H				
Oregon		H			H		H		H	H	H
Pennsylvania		H								H	
Rhode Island	H										
South Carolina											
South Dakota					B				B	B	B
Tennessee											
Texas											
Utah	B	H					H		B	B	B
Vermont											
Virginia	H	H			H	H	H			H	H
Washington		S			S		S		S	S	S
West Virginia											
Wisconsin	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Wyoming											
District of Columbia		S		S	S		S	S			S

Table 00-2.47 Transition Processes, cont'd.

Key:

S=Senate

H=House or Assembly

B=Both chambers

Note:

1. The following chambers did not return a survey: Alabama House, Delaware Senate, Mississippi Senate, New Jersey Senate and General Assembly, New York Senate, Rhode Island Senate, Vermont House, American Samoa Senate and House, Guam Senate, Northern Mariana Islands Senate and House, Puerto Rico Senate and House, and Virgin Islands Senate.

Table 00-2.48 More Transition Procedures

State (1)	Explanation of duties of leadership positions	Explanations of proper protocol	Explanations of office organization	Explanations of how to make committee selections	Explanations of how to make bill referrals	Explanations of how to run committee or session	Identification of key internal resources	Identification of key external resources	Mock sessions are held	Mock committee hearings are held	Other
Alabama											2
Alaska											
Arizona	H	H				B	H	H	B	B	
Arkansas											
California	H		H				H	H	H	H	
Colorado		S					S	S	S	S	
Connecticut										S	
Delaware											
Florida	S	B	S	H		B	B	H	B	H	
Georgia	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S			
Hawaii	H				H	H	H				
Idaho		H									
Illinois											
Indiana	H										
Iowa	S	S			S	S	S	S	S		
Kansas							H	H	B	B	3
Kentucky											
Louisiana					S		S		S	S	
Maine	H	H	H						H		
Maryland											
Massachusetts											
Michigan		S	S			S	S	S	S		
Minnesota	H	H				H	H		H	H	
Mississippi											
Missouri											4
Montana		B				B	B		B	B	

Table 00-2.48 More Transition Procedures, cont'd.

State (1)	Explanation of duties of leadership positions	Explanations of proper protocol	Explanations of office organization	Explanations of how to make committee selections	Explanations of how to make bill referrals	Explanations of how to run committee or session	Identification of key internal resources	Identification of key external resources	Mock sessions are held	Mock committee hearings are held	Other
Nebraska											
Nevada											
New Hampshire		H							H	H	
New Jersey											
New Mexico											
New York											
North Carolina											
North Dakota											
Ohio	H	H		H	H	H	B	B	H	H	
Oklahoma	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H			
Oregon		H		H	H	H	H		H	H	
Pennsylvania											
Rhode Island											
South Carolina											
South Dakota										B	
Tennessee											
Texas											
Utah		S				B			H		
Vermont											
Virginia	H			H	H	H	H		H	H	
Washington	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S			
West Virginia											
Wisconsin	B	B	B	H	H	B	H		B		
Wyoming											
District of Columbia		S			S		S				

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2. Alabama: In the Senate, an orientation for new members is conducted by the State Law Institute, and computer training is provided by the legislative computer staff.
3. Kansas: In the Senate, money is appropriated for transition offices and staff.
4. Missouri: In the House, the transition process is at the total discretion of the incoming leadership. As a result, practices vary.