

TIPS *for the President-Elect*

The following suggestions are offered by the faculty of AASCU's New Presidents Academy primarily for the period between the announcement of your selection as president-elect and the time you assume office as the president or chancellor.

■ **In your early public statements at the time of your appointment be sure to:**

- ▶ express respect for the past and the contributions of your predecessors and their colleagues;
- ▶ focus on core academic values rather than immediate concerns; and
- ▶ avoid over-promising and making premature commitments.

■ **Appoint a "Transition Coordinator" at your new campus to:**

- ▶ coordinate your itinerary during visits to campus prior to taking office, gather information and reports, coordinate communications to and from you, and assist you with your calendar and other transition requirements.

■ **Visit your new campus, but not frequently. During your initial visits:**

- ▶ conduct yourself as the president—you are no longer the candidate!
- ▶ take charge of your calendar by setting clear priorities as to what you are trying to accomplish;
- ▶ arrange to meet "key players," both on and off-campus;
- ▶ cultivate a relationship with your predecessor and also try to make contact with all predecessors, particularly if they reside in the region;
- ▶ assume a listening and learning mode;
- ▶ remember that who you spend time with and what you talk about will signal who and what you value (understand that you become a "megaphone");
- ▶ avoid undue reference to your current institution, such as "at _____ we do it this way";



- ▶ expect overtures from those aggrieved during your predecessor's tenure and watch out for the "hot potatoes" issues that people try to get you to commit to addressing;
- ▶ learn the history of the issues facing the institution; why are things the way they are?
- ▶ lead by asking questions, not by making pronouncements;
- ▶ defer judgments on issues and people; and

■ **Consider conducting a "Stakeholder Survey"**

- ▶ Request representatives of critical stakeholders to respond to questions you prepare and have their responses forwarded to you in a confidential process.

For example, ask questions such as:

- What do you admire most about the institution?
- What are the institution's most distinctive characteristics, assets, and strengths?
- What special opportunities are possible for the institution?
- What are the most critical issues and challenges facing the institution that you hope will be addressed by the new administration?
- What advice or suggestions do you have for me as the new president?

A survey of this kind will expedite your learning curve and portray you as a president who is interested in the views of others. The results of the survey can also be framed for distribution to the campus and community as part of a strategic planning or visioning process after your arrival.

■ **Be selective and focused in your listening and learning.**

- ▶ Learn the background and origin of critical issues, the core values and the culture, the political landscape and how governance functions, the institution's budget and financial condition, and the academic programs. Read historical material about the institution. Learning the history and culture of the university may be more important than the issues of the day.

■ **Begin constructing a systematic "entry plan" for your first 100 days in office.**

- ▶ Establish focused priorities and strategies for achieving them. Have a purpose for what you do and how you invest your time.

■ **Make building relationships with the people a priority.**



- **Consider establishing a “Transition Advisory Committee” to:**
 - ▶ facilitate your transition and provide feedback during your first year. The search committee that recruited you to the institution often can serve this purpose.

- **Identify an experienced sitting or former AASCU president to serve as a personal confidant and adviser during your transition year.**

- **As you are preparing to leave your present position and assume your presidency, be sensitive to the fact that you are not the only one transitioning.**
 - ▶ Colleagues at your current and new institution will be experiencing conflicting emotions that are normal during transitions. The challenge of letting go of the past and preparing for a new beginning will be a common experience for many people in your life. Pay particular attention to the needs and emotions of family and friends; talk to them about the transition and what it means to everyone concerned. Should you have a spouse, be particularly sensitive to spousal “transition” issues and the time and support that your spouse may need.

- **Before you relocate to your new institution allocate time for vacation, reflection, and renewal. By all means do not assume your presidency the day after you leave your present position.**

- **If you have been appointed from within the institution, the following additional ideas are suggested for your consideration:**
 - ▶ Don’t assume you have all the insights – you still should assume a listening mode from the perspective of being the president.
 - ▶ It will be important to show respect for your predecessor; however, being from the inside capture the right level and tone. Don’t be naïve about this—the campus will not appreciate unfounded praise.
 - ▶ Be decisive as soon as you can—you won’t be permitted by the campus to have a long learning curve—move in a timely fashion on win-win opportunities. Pick low-hanging fruit.
 - ▶ Be truthful and objective but fair with individuals in key leadership positions—changes may be necessary
 - ▶ Some people may assume you will be a clone of your predecessor—be very clear immediately as to how you intend to lead and share your ideas and values broadly. Hopefully, you have “walked the talk” to this point in your present position.



- ▶ Be aware of the perceptions, prejudices, and baggage that you may inappropriately bring with you. Learn the issues and the people from a new perspective, you may be surprised what you discover

■ **Some new presidents will be appointed as “interim presidents,” and may come to that role from either inside or outside of the institution. Suggestions for interim presidents include:**

- ▶ Understand that you are the president and that you will be held accountable for every aspect of the institution for the duration of your time in office
- ▶ As an interim president, your most important responsibility is to prepare the university for new presidential leadership. You have the responsibility to advocate for its interests and protect its integrity.
- ▶ If you have been appointed from the outside you should follow the tips suggested above for newly appointed presidents:
 - Focus on learning all you can about the institution
 - cultivate relationships with key stakeholders
 - avoid embarking on a significant change agenda and personnel actions without a clear mandate from the board or system head
 - Avoid actions that appropriately should be left to your successor

If you are appointed as interim president from the inside you are advised to follow the tips above when applicable. Try to “re-learn” the institution from the perspective of the presidency and re-establish critical relationships on and off-campus.

No matter your path to the presidency, enroll in the AASCU New Presidents Academy!

Tips for the President-Elect was originally authored by John W. Moore President Emeritus, Indiana State University (subsequent edits were made by NPA Coordinators, Patricia Cormier, President Emerita, Longwood University and Jolene Koester, President Emerita, California State University, Northridge).

AASCU New Presidents Academy Staff Contact:

Kathleen Scott | 202.478.4644

scottk@aacscu.org

