

MARIN EMERGENCY RADIO AUTHORITY

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DATE: June 27, 2018
TO: MERA Governing Board
FROM: Maureen Cassingham, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM **B-2**: PROPOSED MERA SUCCESSION PLAN

Recommended Action: With Executive Officer Work Plan Committee input, discuss, provide direction and periodically revisit the Proposed MERA Succession Plan.

Background: MERA is a unique 25-member agency governed by Governing and Executive Boards with input from several standing and occasional ad hoc committees. The Authority is currently staffed by three part-time contractors including the Executive Officer (E.O.) - who directly reports to the Executive and Governing Boards - Deputy Executive Officer-Next Gen Project and Administrative Assistant-Next Gen Project, who provide administrative and logistical support for day-to-day operations and special projects, respectively.

MERA also contracts with the County for Operations Officer Services. This position is a direct-report to the MERA Executive and Governing Boards and is responsible for administration of MERA System maintenance and technical services and Next Gen Implementation using County Communications Staff, consultants and vendors (see attached MERA Organization Chart).

The Executive Officer model, wherein the incumbent's only assignment is MERA, has served the Authority well. However, MERA contract staff support as a sole client may be problematic to achieve in the future. Therefore, the Governing Board may wish to revisit the Executive Officer's contractual services going forward if a different approach is desired, required and/or as Authority activities return to a maintenance mode. As for the Deputy Executive Officer and Administrative Assistant positions, which have been dedicated solely to the Next Gen System Project for Next Gen Project outreach and implementation, these assignments will sunset with Project completion.

The most important reason to engage in succession planning, especially with a small, very unique organization with somewhat unconventional staff relationships, is, to the extent possible, to ensure continuity of the support of governance in carrying out MERA's mission, its services and goals. Further, advanced planning is also intended to support organizational stability and sustainability by having strategies in place to address contractor transitions and changes in future operations. Finally, discussing and producing a plan to address staff and organizational changes will demonstrate to MERA's member agencies the Governing Board's proactive commitment to looking ahead.

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As you are aware, there is a significant challenge in succession planning with MERA given it has no employees, thus making it difficult to do the usual development of staff through promotions, lateral moves, assignments to special projects and provision of internal and external training opportunities to assure leadership continuity. Part of succession planning should include periodically revisiting MERA's short and long-term goals as identified in the 2010 Strategic Plan and annual E.O. goals to assist in analyzing future staffing needs and workload with an eye toward developing the best succession options. This will also result in better understanding of the needs of a more maintenance-focused operation after completion of the Next Gen Project. Transition planning should include how the Executive Officer's duties are currently being performed and how they might be performed in the future. The Executive Officer Work Plan Committee might be tasked to periodically undertake these analyses in greater depth in advance of staff transitions.

Attached is the current Scope of Services for the E.O. In support of the E.O., MERA contracts with the Novato Fire Protection District, which provides an average of eight hours per week accounting and audit support services and four hours per week of Administrative Assistant services. This approach permits the delivery of current E.O. services with the "look and feel" of a full-time MERA office. Different support staffing scenarios for the E.O. would permit greater delegation of tasks but will incur more costs.

It should be clarified that the E.O. position develops all general administrative work products (i.e., staff reports, budgets, preparation of meeting minutes, approval of all invoices from MERA funds, etc.), special Project initiatives and inputs to MERA Next Gen activities and work products. Any significant change in MERA operations and/or member expectations, should trigger revisiting how these services are delivered.

Some of the following possible short-term and long-term Executive Officer transition options that might be considered are:

- 1) Using other current RGS contract staff after Next Gen Project completion.
- 2) Using retiring/retired MERA Board or Committee Members or Member Agency Staff familiar with MERA operations.
- 3) Using other RGS contractors serving other "like" public agencies.
- 4) Contracting with a Member Agency to provide all/some of MERA's administrative services.

Recommended key succession preparation activities include:

- 1) Knowledge transfer via cross training and/or shadowing.
- 2) Development of effective documentation of day-to-day and special tasks.
- 3) Development of a task "tickler file" to assure time sensitive actions.

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Suggested Executive Officer qualifications should include:

- 1) Public sector administration, preferably in **regional or** local government.
- 2) Familiarity with public safety organizations and operations.
- 3) Experience with public agency budgeting, accounting, financing and audits.
- 4) Ability to work with multiple agencies and multi-level governance.
- 5) Ability to work independently on a range of duties from high-level project administration to routine tasks.
- 6) Experience in working “hands on” in small organizations.
- 7) Flexibility in dealing with a myriad of time-sensitive tasks and last-minute changes.

The above perspectives are based on 10+ years of experience with MERA operations and interactions with past and current Boards and Committee members. However, as future organization operations and goals change and as member expectations evolve, different administrative approaches may need to be applied to them.

ATTACHMENTS:

B-2a MERA Next Gen System Project Organization Chart and
Position Description of Executive Officer – Scope of Services