



Transition of Power: From One Presidential Administration to the Next

Center Forward Basics
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Overview

The transfer of power from one Presidential Administration to the next is one of the most important processes in our American democracy. According to the Partnership for Public Services' Center for Presidential Transition, "presidential transitions are big, complicated and dangerous." What does this transition entail and why is it so important?

From One Administration to the Next

As anyone can guess, the Presidential transition process refers to the "changing of the guard"- the move from one Administration to the next. Sometimes this occurs when Presidents are from the same Party, while other times it is not. Either way, it entails change of policy and personnel. That is why the government and outside organizations advocate for a streamlined process to ensure a seamless transfer of power. This is not only important to make sure basic services and functions are carried on for the American people, but also to show the rest of the world that the United States is stable and able to handle a proper succession of power.

When Does the Transition Process Begin?

Many think the transition begins on November 4th, the day after the election, but in reality, it begins much earlier than that. Leading candidates from both parties begin an informal transition process as early as spring of the election year. While many may view this as work done in vain, in the big picture this is vital for a potential Administration to be ready on Inauguration Day to deal with anything that comes their way, particularly with regard to national security and major economic concerns.

Role of the Transition

Once each of the two major parties select their Presidential nominees, the candidates form official, government-recognized transition teams where staff levels can reach 150-200 people. Staff do not work for the campaign but rather as a complete other organization which seeks to do the following:

- **Develop Campaign Policies Into Actionable Items:** Staff work on developing the campaign pledges a certain candidate has made into federal policy and legislation so proposals can be worked on as soon as the President is inaugurated. Likewise, in the short time after Inauguration, a President must deliver a State of the Union, present a budget, and detail a larger agenda for the first several months of their presidency. Work months before is crucial. Also, during this time, staff review the work of the various agencies to see where specific priorities fit

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Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit www.center-forward.org

Key Facts

- The President has the authority to nominate or appoint 4,000 government positions. One thousand of these require Senate confirmation.
- It can take months to fill all the political appointee vacancies- most Administrations only fill a few hundred in the first months.
- Agencies in the federal government develop "agency review teams" and utilize "agency transition liaisons" and career employees to identify key issues of concern for incoming agency heads so they can be ready on day one.

and where “flashpoints” exist.

- **Political Appointments:** The President has the authority to nominate or appoint at least 4,000 government positions. One thousand of these require Senate confirmation. The transition team tends to vet Cabinet-level and key deputies early on, as well as key White House personnel. Other important positions that the team vets are Deputy Secretaries, Under Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries. Later on in the process, usually after the election, they start to vet certain Schedule C appointments. These are positions that serve at the pleasure of the President and do not require Senate confirmation.
- **Operational and Logistical Support:** The official transition team of the President-elect gives operational and logistical support in the months before Inauguration. They are assisted in things such as office space, human resources, and communications, IT support and congressional and other outreach work. Also, transition teams work to develop a legal infrastructure, including such items as who can serve in an Administration (i.e., any ban on lobbyists comes through this process).

Transition Funding

The transition is funded through both government and private sector funding. In 2010, Congress passed legislation that provides for federal funding to support a transition office. In the Fiscal Year 2020 budget, \$9.62 million was approved for the incoming President’s transition team, divided with \$6.3 million for the direct transition efforts, \$1 million for appointee orientations, and \$2.6 million for the Outgoing Transition Support Team. In 2010, the legislation also allowed for private funding to be utilized via donations to a 501(c)(4) organization set up by the transition. Individuals are permitted to give \$5,000 per person.

According to the 1963 Presidential Transition Act, the General Services Administration (GSA) must send a letter verifying the election results in order to begin the transition to the next administration. Once the GSA ascertains the winner of the presidential election, the president-elect gets office space in each government agency to begin the transition process and funds to begin hiring transition personnel.

Role of Outgoing Administration and Federal Government

The role of the outgoing White House is to set a tone of cooperation so that pertinent information, especially on pressing national security and intelligence issues, are carried over. The Bush-Obama transition has widely been credited by experts as a great example of how cooperation should occur, as President Bush is credited with assisting the incoming Administration with what it needed and President-elect Obama’s team for utilizing their knowledge and resources. As for agencies in the federal government, most develop “agency review teams” and utilize “agency transition liaisons” and career employees to identify key issues of concern for incoming agency heads so they are ready on day one.

Links to Other Resources

- Center for Presidential Transition - [Transition Guide](#)
- CNN - [What is a transition? Presidential turnover explained](#)
- U.S. General Services Administration - [Presidential Transition Directory](#)
- NPR - [Trump Appointee Delays Biden Transition Process, Citing Need For 'Clear' Winner](#)
- The White House - [The Digital Transition: How the Presidential Transition Works in the Social Media Age](#)