

Transition Planning in Canada

Chapter Summary

Transition planning involves a new government and usually a new political party acquiring power from the outgoing leader. The importance of transition planning speaks to the success and effectiveness of the new government and its leader acquiring political power after a successful election. There are three different scenarios that can occur during the transition planning from one leader and one political party. The first scenario is when an opposition party wins an election and takes over from an incumbent government. The second scenario is when the incumbent leader and party win an election and stay in power for another term in office. The third scenario occurs when the political party in power does not change, but a new leader is appointed during a leadership convention to serve as prime minister until an election is called.

A political transition is usually marked by four distinct phases: planning, election, post-election, and consolidation. The first phase, planning, can occur at least a year before the election is held, and requires that the political leader create a transitional team. This team develops a strategy and planning process in preparation for the upcoming election. The election phase, which can occur from 36 days up to the election, involves the transition team (different from the campaign team) surveying and monitoring all political events and activities for the leader. As well, the public service begins to prepare for any potential upcoming transition in government; this falls particularly to the cabinet secretary, who may meet with the transition teams of the opposition parties. This is an especially important meeting if the opposition party is likely to eventually win the election. The third phase, post-election, marks the first 10 to 14 days in office for the new leader and the political party. This phase also includes time for the new cabinet to be formed and the new Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Phase four, or consolidation, begins after the swearing-in ceremony of the new prime minister and the first cabinet meeting.

The transition planning process is a vital component of our democratic system and, in most cases, ensures the peaceful transfer of power from one political leader and political party to the next. The author notes that there are several important governmental considerations that should be identified in advance as relevant for future, smoother transition planning. These considerations involve developing a leadership style, choosing and developing an effective transition team, and building knowledge of this process for the incoming members of Cabinet and their staff.

Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <https://lop.parl.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2015-56-e.htm?cat=government>

This Library of Parliament report outlines the transitions involved to usher in the forty-second Parliament. This includes an overview, questions and answers and specifically the key people, such as the prime minister, ministers, Members of Parliament, and the overall government bureaucracy's involvement in the transition planning process.

- 2) <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-election-2015-privy-council-office-transition-government-1.3269132>

This is a CBC news report that provides information on the role that Canada's Privy Council Office had in the last federal election, specifically involving the political parties' promises and the relevance of this role for transitional planning from one government to the successful party and leader that wins the election.

- 3) <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Transitions%20-%20preparing%20for%20changes%20to%20government.pdf>

A report written by the Institute for Government in the United Kingdom addressing the implications of transitional planning for the opposition party and the civil service, both before and after the election results when preparing for changes of a government.