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The Many Roles of the Governors' Chief of Staff



NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

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"Hold tight. Enjoy the ride. Be flexible."

VETERAN CHIEF OF STAFF

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All governors designate a senior staff member to serve as their chief of staff (chief). Though the titles may differ, this appointment is arguably the most important a governor will make. The roles and responsibilities detailed in this publication are based on the experiences of chiefs in numerous states and reflect their input as well as input from a number of governors.

Managing the Governor's Time

Time is the governor's most valuable and most limited resource. Many people compete for the governors' time, including family, friends, constituents, staff, agency heads, party leaders, interest groups and legislative leaders. Managing the governor's time is one of the most challenging and important responsibilities held by the chief.

Managing the Governor's Policy Agenda and Message

The chief has the responsibility to ensure the governor's vision and programs are understood, advanced and implemented. The chief must devote considerable attention to make sure the governor's staff, administration officials and state employees are focused on the governor's priorities.

Managing the Governor's Administration

If the governor is the chief executive of the state, in a significant number of states the chief is the chief operating officer. Chiefs carry much of the day-to-day responsibility of ensuring that state agencies and operations are functioning and effectively and efficiently serving the citizens of the state. The chief also holds the responsibility of making certain decisions are made in a timely manner and at the appropriate level of state government. Because state governments are facing increasing demands to better deliver services for their constituents, an increasing number of governors have appointed chief operating officers (COO) to work closely with the chief of staff to ensure effective and efficient state government operations. When it is defined well, the relationship between the COO and the Chief of Staff can enhance both of their capabilities. The COO can leverage the Chief of Staff's relationship with the Governor to understand, communicate, and drive high-priority initiatives, while the Chief of Staff will be less distracted by operational needs and can instead devote more attention to other duties such as the policy agenda, legislative outreach, constituent relations, and strategic thinking.

Managing the Governor's Team

The task of developing the cabinet and governor's staff into a team is a major responsibility of

both the governor and the chief. The chief focuses considerable attention on creating the team, motivating its members and keeping everyone on the team informed.

Managing the Unexpected

As chief executive of the state, the governor is responsible for ensuring that his or her state is adequately prepared for man-made and natural emergencies and disasters. The chief is responsible for establishing clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the governor, for himself/herself, for the governor's communications director and for other key staff during an emergency or disaster and making certain the key cabinet officials comprising the state's standard crisis team have the expertise, staffing and other resources necessary to respond to a crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Every governor has a chief. Although the title "chief of staff" may not be formally assigned, every governor designates a senior staff member to serve in this role. While the responsibilities assigned to the chief will vary from state to state, this is arguably the most important appointment a governor will make.

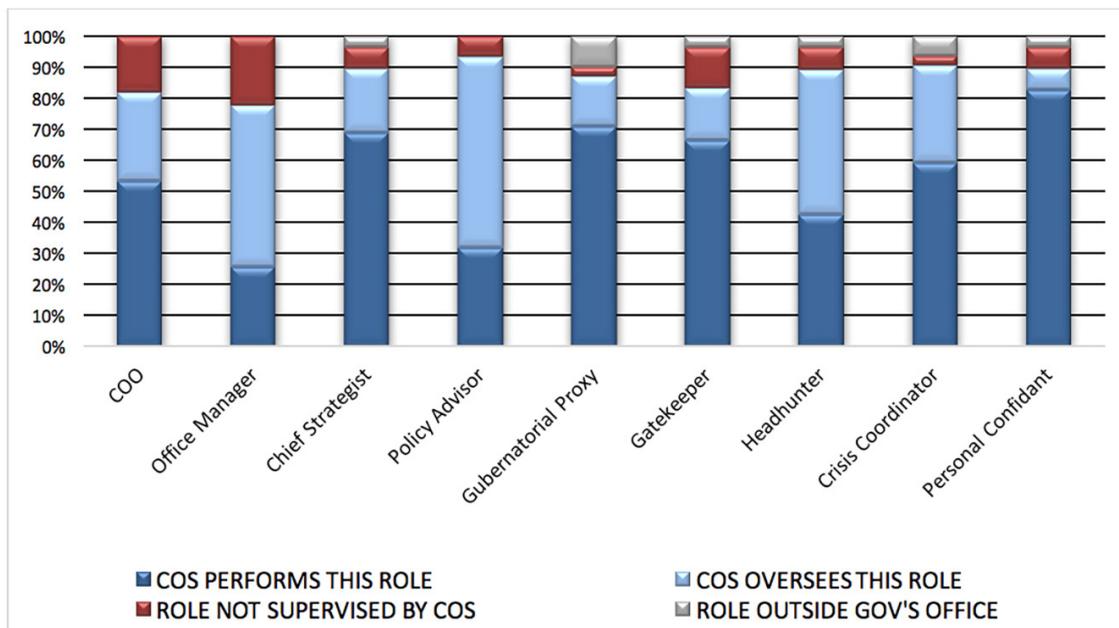
The governor must be confident that the chief will ensure the effective performance of all critical functions of the governor's office or delegate functions to other governors' staff members or administration officials. Some governors prefer to concentrate critical functions with a few individuals; other governors prefer to distribute the critical functions among many. How the roles are assigned also is influenced by factors such as the talents and desires of the chief and other staff members and the strengths of the various individuals on whom the governor can call. Even when another staff member holds the primary responsibility for performing a key function, most chiefs will maintain a level of involvement. As a chief noted, **"It does not make a difference if it is your assignment or not, as the chief you are responsible for everything."**

The original Many Roles of the Governor's Chiefs of Staff presented nine critical functions performed by chiefs:

- Chief operating officer
- Office manager
- Chief strategist
- Policy advisor
- Gubernatorial proxy
- Gatekeeper
- Headhunter
- Crisis coordinator
- Personal confidant

Surveys, chiefs presentations and informal discussions with dozens of chiefs over the past two decades have confirmed these roles. Their validity was again confirmed by the results of a 2018 chiefs survey conducted by the National Governors Association (NGA), which revealed that the chief either performs or oversees all key roles in almost all 27 states that responded. (Chart 1)

CHART 1: MANY ROLES OF A GOVERNOR'S CHIEF OF STAFF



NGA recognizes the complexity of the chief position and presents the critical functions they perform through the following five broad management categories:

- Managing the Governor’s Time
- Managing the Governor’s Policy Agenda and Message
- Managing the Governor’s Administration
- Managing the Governor’s Team
- Managing the Unexpected



It is important to note that these categories are not independent of one another, but overlap each day throughout the life cycle of the governor’s administration and the tenure of the chief.

MANAGING THE GOVERNOR'S TIME

Time is the governor's most valuable and limited resource; there will always be more requests for the governor's time than can be accommodated. Many people compete for this time, including staff, family, friends, constituents, agency heads, party leaders, interest groups and legislative leaders. Managing the governor's time is one of the chief's highest priorities. The governor's schedule should always be proactive not reactive.

The schedule:

- Serves as a management tool that protects the governor's time;
- Offers the governor the opportunity to set priorities while ensuring adequate time for personal and family needs;
- Is used strategically to schedule meetings, events and appearances that will serve to promote the governor's agenda; and
- Reflects the governor's management style and facilitates the necessary interaction with his or her staff and cabinet.

Chief as Surrogate and Gatekeeper

The governor cannot take every phone call from legislators, reporters and party leaders; attend every meeting; address every audience; or conduct every interview. In those situations, the governor needs a surrogate—someone who can present the governor's views and represent the governor's office. Often, the chief serves that role.

Who gets to see the governor? Who does not? Of course, nobody likes to be told that his/her status is not significant enough or that his/her issue is not important enough to warrant even a short meeting with the governor. Every governor has a set of rules about who does (and does not) get a meeting. When someone is denied a meeting, the request is often referred to the chief.

Often the chief must convince people that their problem is actually better handled by someone other than the governor. The job of protecting the governor's time is a delicate one. It must protect the governor, but not isolate the governor. The chief should expose the governor to a diversity of perspectives before he or she makes a decision. The task calls for more tact than logic. The chief must ensure that real questions are answered, real problems are solved and all egos are stroked. In the end, the only way that the chief can persuade a person not to see the governor may be to handle the request personally.

Chief as the Enforcer

Governors' offices have firm rules limiting when it is possible to say "yes." This is particularly true in scheduling the governor's time. Of course, some people attempt to circumvent the

established rules. They may try to force the governor's scheduling office to make a commitment six months or a year ahead. They may invite the governor personally and pressure him or her to accept on the spot. More significantly, they may misinterpret—unconsciously or consciously—the governor's willingness to consider such an informal invitation as a firm commitment. If this happens, someone has to gently inform the inviting organization “no.” The responsibility for this task may fall to the governor's scheduler. However, if the organization becomes aggressive, the chief may need to act.

The best way to handle ambiguous scheduling issues is to prevent them from occurring. Governors and their chiefs have two strategies for coping with this problem. First, the governor needs to make it clear that he or she never accepts a verbal invitation. “Don't say, ‘I'll try to do it if my schedule will permit,’” warned one governor. “Rather, say ‘I don't do my own schedule.’” The second approach is never to let anyone talk with the governor alone. Many experienced chiefs follow this rule because they have found people who ask the governor a question hear the answer they want to hear. Cautioned one chief: “Don't let anyone in there (the governor's office) with him alone, because they heard exactly what they wanted to hear and will quote it back to you.” To ensure no one can quote the governor as saying “I'd be happy to attend your event,” a chief needs to arrange for someone to sit in on every gubernatorial discussion. More importantly, arranging for a staff member to sit in on gubernatorial discussions prevents misrepresentation of governor's decisions on policy related matters.

Chief as Liaison with the Governor's Spouse

Many chiefs consider it part of their responsibility to prevent conflicts from emerging between the governor's staff and the governor's family. Usually these conflicts revolve around time and scheduling. “The governor wants to accept every invitation,” observed one chief. The result is a conflict that appears to be between the scheduler and the spouse, but can, at its core, be between the governor and spouse. To solve this problem, many chiefs invite the spouse or the spouse's assistant to attend all scheduling meetings. Both the chief and the governor's spouse want to prevent the governor from becoming overscheduled.

MANAGING THE GOVERNOR'S POLICY AGENDA • MESSAGE

The chief has the responsibility for ensuring that the governor's vision and programs are realized. The governor is involved personally and directly in every governing strategy, policy agenda or issue campaign. Because the governor is the most obvious and visible symbol of his or her policies, the strategy must emphasize his or her values. The chief must ensure that the strategy brings out the best in the governor, makes the best use of the governor's talents and reflects the governor's beliefs.

Perhaps the most consistent piece of advice experienced governors give their new colleagues is “Limit your agenda.” The governor needs a policy agenda, but that agenda must be limited and focused.

The chief is responsible for overseeing the development of the governor’s policy agenda. The policy director or advisor is typically responsible for shaping the general concepts and specific details of the agenda with input from the communications director, policy staff and cabinet members. The chief often must take charge and bring the pieces together coherently. “If you can think beyond the short two-year time horizon of the legislature,” said one chief, “you can control the agenda.”

Once the agenda is established and communicated, people who work in state government can easily forget it. After all, they have their ongoing assignments, responsibilities and daily crises. The agenda is necessarily visionary—and thus somewhat ephemeral. If it seems unconnected to the day’s events, it can be forgotten easily. Consequently, the chief must devote considerable attention to keeping everyone who works in state government focused on the governor’s priorities.

Chief as Broker with the Legislature

Every governor requires legislative support to accomplish his or her agenda and plan for the state. Inevitably, the chief is pulled into the legislative arena. Of course, the governor is the best lobbyist for his or her program, but the second best lobbyist may be the person closest to the governor—the chief. Every time the chief comes in contact with a legislator, it is an opportunity to lobby—informally and subtly—for the governor’s program. In the final days of the legislative session, while the governor is talking to one legislator, the chief can be talking to another.

Legislator phone calls to the governor often can be returned by the chief or other staff member. This process of the chief returning calls may indeed be able to resolve the reason for a call. **Observed one governor: “Eighty percent of the calls [to the governor] can be handled by somebody else.”**

Often it falls to the chief to be certain that every legislator gets their share of attention. However, one should be mindful that in the eyes of legislators, chiefs of staff do not hold the same weight as governors. Consequently, the chief needs to be personally conscious of legislative prerogatives. The task often may require a self-effacing wit; it most certainly requires diplomacy.

Chief as Spokesperson (or not)

An effective communications operation is vital for a successful, productive tenure as governor. The media can carry information to the public about the governor's agenda and work on important state issues. All agree, in the words of one chief, that "overseeing relations with the press is an important role." **In fact, an increasing trend is chiefs of staff with communications backgrounds and experience.** All chiefs are not in agreement about serving as spokesperson. However, chiefs acknowledge that there is certainly pressure to be a spokesperson. One chief noted two conditions that could force the chief to become a gubernatorial spokesperson: (1) when the governor does not regularly engage with the press, and (2) when the press secretary is not close enough to the governor to be able to speak for the governor. This chief observed that deciding whether he likes dealing with the press is "a luxury I cannot afford."

Some chiefs prefer to remain anonymous. "I feel it is important," said one chief, "that I not be a personality or public figure on my own." Another argued that "a too visible chief becomes very much of a liability for a governor." A third noted, "A low profile is what has worked really well for me over the years." In addition to the general liabilities of becoming a public figure, other chiefs noted particular disadvantages of being quoted by the media. "Unless you have a good, working, substantive knowledge [of the issue]," said one chief who has minimal contact with reporters, "you [can] get into more trouble" talking to the press than not. Another noted the extra significance attached to any statement made by the chief. "You can always claim that the press secretary misspoke," said one chief, but "when you're the chief, your word is just like the governor's." Many chiefs deflect all press calls to the governor's press office. **One chief has a simple agreement with his press secretary: "He's not going to be chief of staff. I'm not going to be press secretary."**

MANAGING THE GOVERNOR'S ADMINISTRATION

If the governor is the chief executive officer of the state, the chief is the chief operating officer. A significant amount of the governor's time and energy is focused on people and organizations outside of state government. Consequently, chiefs carry much of the day-to-day responsibility of ensuring that state agencies and operations are functioning and serving the citizens of the state. It should be noted that some governors want their chief to focus on tasks related most directly to the governor and assign the chief operating officer's role to others within the governor's administration.

The chief has the responsibility for ensuring that the governor's vision and programs are being realized by state agencies. If the governor is to have an impact on the day-to-day functioning of state government and implementation of public programs and the governor's agenda, someone must continually monitor and manage what is occurring in the cabinet and the departments, where the day-to-day work of state government is performed.

Chiefs often report that the role of chief operating officer is the most demanding of their time. As one chief commented, “COO is the more time consuming role as it requires time and commitment to follow up with cabinet secretaries on a daily basis to ensure all personnel, policy and financial issues for each department are reported to the governor’s office and a swift decision is made if required by the governor.”

An increasing number of governors have appointed chief operating officers (COO) to work closely with the chief of staff to ensure effective and efficient state government operations. 13 states and Puerto Rico currently have COOs in place, while 24 additional states have COO-like roles that are narrower in mandate. When it is defined well, the relationship between the COO and the Chief of Staff can enhance both of their capabilities. The COO can leverage the Chief of Staff’s relationship with the Governor to understand, communicate, and drive high-priority initiatives, while the Chief of Staff will be less distracted by operational needs and can instead devote more attention to other duties such as the policy agenda, legislative outreach, constituent relations, and strategic thinking. Should a governor decide to appoint a COO in addition to the Chief of Staff, the COO can help drive the governor’s performance and operational excellence agenda, take an enterprise-wide view of government operations, and be the change agent for making government work better for its constituents.

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

When the governor must make a significant decision, the chief usually is responsible for organizing the process. The chief has the responsibility to make certain the governor always receives a comprehensive set of facts, analysis and recommendations. In consultation with the governor’s other policy advisors, the chief will decide what analyses to commission, what alternatives to pursue and what recommendations to consider.

Usually, the chief establishes parameters for how the governor will make a decision. The chief decides who will present what recommendations to the governor, when to first bring an issue to the governor’s attention and when to push for a final decision. “It makes a difference,” said one chief, “when you present an issue to him.” Explained another chief, “I slow some things down, and I speed some things up.” If the governor is not kept abreast of the issue or if critical analyses are not available, he or she may be unprepared to make a timely decision. If pushed to make a decision before all the necessary information can be presented, the governor may make a precipitous choice. If the wrong people are assigned to present the facts, analyses and recommendations, the governor may undervalue certain perspectives.

How facts, analyses and recommendations are presented depends on the governor’s preferences. They may be presented in a long analytical memorandum, aired in debate conducted before the governor or set forth in a series of meetings with experts. **“Figure out how you learn,” one governor suggested to his colleagues, “and then teach your staff how you learn.”** Clearly, the chief needs to determine how his or her governor learns.

How the chief can best serve as an honest broker depends on the nature of the decision to be made and the preferences of the governor.

The chief also is responsible for ensuring that decisions are made at the correct level of state government. Some are significant and far reaching and should be made by the governor to avoid the possibility of an uninformed individual making a decision without understanding its full implications. Consequently, the chief needs to be aware of emerging issues so that the governor has the opportunity to make decisions before it is too late. Equally important is for the governor not to be trapped into making too many decisions.

For numerous reasons, most decisions should be made at much lower levels by those who possess the on-the-scene information and those who must implement and live with these decisions. Moreover, once those in the governor's office begin making micro-decisions or begin reconsidering decisions made at lower levels, the natural reaction will be for agency heads to buck all their decisions upstairs. Said one governor, "I try to push everything that is possible out of the governor's office."

Of course the governor constantly must reinforce the specifics of his or her agenda, and the chief continually must monitor agency decisions to ensure they are in consonance with that agenda. Nevertheless, if the agenda is articulated well, the chief will want to keep his or her desk as well as the governor's desk, clear for the really big decisions by delegating as many minor issues as possible to the agencies.

Talking the Governor Out of a Bad Idea or Decision

When the governor makes an unwise decision, someone has to talk him or her out of it. "Our role is to point out the consequences," said one chief. It is quite possible to provide the governor with enough information—from a different perspective—to convince him or her to reevaluate the idea and make a different decision. One chief advocates bringing additional people into the process. "These should be the people the governor trusts the most." On these occasions, some chiefs bring the governor's kitchen cabinet into the process; the governor may believe that government officials are biased, but may think differently about outsider advisors.

Addressing Defensive Issues

One gubernatorial chief divides all the issues confronting the governor into two categories: offensive and defensive. Offensive issues reflect the governor's agenda; they have become public issues because the governor has highlighted them. In contrast, defensive issues are those with which the governor is forced to address. Defensive issues naturally detract from the time and attention that the governor and staff can devote to offensive issues and represent mostly potential negatives. The chief needs a process for identifying emerging defensive issues. The chief needs to know about upcoming court decisions, federal legislation, social trends and

public attitudes that might put the governor on the defensive, and be prepared to address them. This may involve nothing more, for example, than thinking through what the governor should say depending upon how the court rules. Alternatively, it may involve consulting an expert to gain a better understanding of the issue and, if necessary, developing a policy before the issue becomes a crisis. Handling defensive issues may not appear to be the most pressing of the chief's duties; yet, if some defensive issue suddenly emerges, inevitably the chief will be responsible for organizing the response. Thus, devoting a little time anticipating potential problems may prove a wise investment.

Learning about and Reporting the Bad News

Observed one governor: "Bad news doesn't travel up." The governor may be the last one to learn something was handled poorly. The next to last person may be the chief. The chief needs to guard carefully against this. Part of the job of protecting the governor is making certain the governor learns about bad news in time to respond effectively. The chief is in touch with the cabinet secretaries, department heads and agency directors, making the task of collecting information relatively easy. The chief needs to be sure that bad news as well as good news is reported. Many chiefs warn their staff and cabinet officials, "no surprises."

Managing Ongoing Issues

Some issues never go away. Fortunately the responsibility of monitoring ongoing issues usually can be assigned to another senior staff member or cabinet official. It is this person's job to keep the chief and the governor informed about all new developments. Obviously the chief needs to be involved when a policy decision is required on an ongoing issue; however, the chief must be kept abreast of developments. Developments that may seem inconsequential to another senior staff member may have particular significance to a person with the chief's breadth of responsibilities.

Managing the Governor's Office

In addition to the responsibility for making certain that state operations are running effectively and efficiently, the chief must make certain that the governor's office runs this way as well. A typical governor's office contains a number of sub-units with varied responsibilities, such as press relations, scheduling, legislative liaison, legal counsel, correspondence, constituent affairs and appointments. Whether these units are large or small, someone must oversee their daily operations and manage their interrelations. This task may fall to the chief, but it is more likely that the chief will delegate the task to a trusted senior staff member, such as his or her deputy chief.

MANAGING THE GOVERNOR'S TEAM

Converting the cabinet and governor's staff into a team is a major responsibility of the governor and chief. Common problems confronting chiefs of staff are friction and disagreements among cabinet officials and between cabinet officials and governor's staff. Regardless of how the governor's agenda is defined, once established it must receive constant attention not only with the media, public and legislators, but within state government as well. One governor said, "Your whole team has to know your priorities." Governors also must build loyalty of their state employees because the governor relies on them to implement his or her programs.

Gubernatorial Staff

Motivating the staff is an ongoing process. It is an activity that must be on the daily agenda of every chief. As one chief explained, there are five things every member of the governor's staff has to know:

1. Their job objectives;
2. The extent of their authority;
3. The results they are expected to produce;
4. The person to whom they report; and
5. The areas for which they will be held accountable.

The keys to being successful at managing the governor's staff, continues this chief, are to hire good people, delegate authority, hold them accountable and not have \$100-per-hour people do \$10-per-hour jobs.

The chief needs to devote considerable attention to creating the gubernatorial team and motivating its members. Just as the governor cannot direct all of the operations of state government, the chief cannot direct all of the operations of the governor's staff. Indeed, the objective of any manager is to create an organization that requires minimal direct supervision. The steps it takes to build such a team are no big secret; yet if the manager is not careful, these steps may be overlooked. One experienced gubernatorial staffer emphasized the old military adage: "Take care of the troops, and the troops will take care of you."

A key step is simply keeping everyone informed. One reason for this is obvious: if the governor's staff is to function smoothly, everyone needs to know what is happening. Having hired competent staff, the governor and chief are able to trust them to make the right decisions and take the correct actions. However, analytical skills and political acumen are of no benefit if the staff does not have the information they need for intelligent decisions and actions.

Keeping everyone informed is also important for staff retention. Most people join the governor's staff to be part of the major decisions affecting the state. Keeping the staff informed—even about small events unrelated to their immediate responsibilities—is a simple, inexpensive way

of motivating staff and ensuring that staff receive important “benefits” for their hard work.

Staff meetings are a good vehicle to inform people of recent developments, raise issues for future consideration, issue assignments, report progress, think through problems and make decisions. The chief also sets the style for these meetings. How formal will they be? How inclusive? How participatory? The manner in which the governor’s staff conducts its meetings affects how they do the rest of their work. Consequently, when the chief is making decisions about how to conduct the inevitable staff meetings, he or she also is making unconscious and important decisions about how to conduct the work of the governor’s office.

Successful chiefs often give credit where credit is due. One chief suggested taking individuals into the governor’s office and saying: “Governor, I just want you to know that Sally did a great job on this project.” A letter of thanks from the governor to a staff member for a job well done is always appreciated. Some governors host key staff and family at the governor’s residence. One governor advocated “work[ing] with your people to build a sense of family and commitment.”

Another approach to motivating staff members is to ensure that everyone gets to see the boss—and frequently. One governor arrives at the capitol at 8 a.m. and walks through his office shaking hands with everyone. Not only does this improve morale, explained the chief, but it also gets another half hour of work out of people; they show up promptly at 8 a.m. to be sure that they get to talk with the governor. In addition, all staff—including the most junior—can be given an opportunity to travel with the governor.

One further approach is allowing those who work on a project to make a presentation to the governor. Clearly, a staff member will work much harder on a project if the chief already has established the norm that the person who performs the work also briefs the governor.

The governor’s staff comprises people with differing personalities, interests and needs. Consequently, and inevitably, the chief will be required to cope with personnel problems. The chief must constantly be on the alert for these problems and address the need to keep staff members out of trouble.

The most obvious and potentially destructive problem is the clash of egos. This may manifest itself in a battle over policy or petty squabbling over turf. In either situation, the chief must keep internal staff politics under control. “Once you let staff infighting start,” explained one chief, “you will never be able to stop it.” The chief must be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each staff member. Further, the chief must be prepared to help staff overcome their professional weaknesses.

Cabinet Officials

Is the cabinet a collection of diverse individuals representing special interests within the administration or a team devoted to carrying out the governor's agenda? "An administration becomes a family," observed one governor, "either a happy family or an unhappy family." The task of converting the cabinet into a team is a major responsibility of the chief. Many of the techniques for doing this are standard and include everything from routine cabinet meetings to special cabinet retreats at pivotal times during the life cycle of the governor's administration. One governor holds an annual cabinet retreat during which the days have a structured agenda and the nights are free for informal social activities.

One departmental commissioner told a new chief that the most important thing the new chief could do is reduce from nine to about five the number of gubernatorial staff who called the commissioner with requests. "One of the challenges," observed the governor in this case, "is how to create a team between staff and cabinet." The chief plays a major role in creating this team and mediating disagreements between the gubernatorial staff and cabinet.

One chief stated, "All of the cabinet officials report directly to me, not the governor. If I find cabinet officers in a meeting in the governor's office that I didn't know about we have a very pointed discussion about it." In another state, a cabinet secretary can get on the governor's schedule without clearing it with the chief. At the same time, all the cabinet agencies know they can get a decision more quickly from the chief than from the governor.

Governors disagree on whether the chief should "give orders" to cabinet officials. Some governors stress that although the chief can deliver messages for the governor, the chief should not give orders. One governor stated, "I've been told that some agency heads resent chiefs of staff bitterly." Other governors argue, "they [department heads] understand that my chief of staff has full authority of the governor." However, all governors agree that if the chief is too heavy handed, it can backfire.

State Employees

Governors must rely on state employees to carry out their programs. Regardless of how energetic and effective the governor and the chief are at articulating the themes and specifics of the governor's agenda, these efforts will prove futile if state employees do not understand and support the governor's agenda. The implication is clear: If the governor treats the people who work in an agency with the same consideration and personal attention given gubernatorial staff, they will be much more responsive to the governor's efforts to get them to act on the governor's agenda.

Nothing can undermine all the efforts to build employee loyalty more quickly than public criticism of state employees. The chief is responsible for building the loyalty of state employees. The chief needs to make the scheduler aware of the importance of building public employee

events and activities into the governor’s schedule and may need to remind speechwriters to add language into speeches to praise state employees’ efforts and service to the public. Consequently, a major task of the chief is to routinize the various activities that help engender loyalty among state employees and build these activities into the governor’s regular schedule. A short list of the most obvious mechanisms for building the loyalty of state employees includes:

- Annual awards for superior performance;
- Employee recognition events;
- Gubernatorial tours of state facilities and offices; and
- Recognition in speeches of the quality of state employees.

After the governor and chief agree on the array of activities the governor will use to engender employee loyalty, actual responsibility for these activities can be delegated to others. The chief needs to monitor these activities to be certain they become part of the gubernatorial routine.

MANAGING THE GOVERNOR'S TEAM		
Gubernatorial Staff	Cabinet Officials	State Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Foster team building » Keep staff informed » Hold staff meetings » Give credit where credit is due » Opportunities for staff to spend time with the governor » Address personnel problems head-on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Hold cabinet meetings and retreats » Create a team among staff and cabinet members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Give state employees the same attention you give to gubernatorial staff » Build employee events and activities into the governor’s schedule » Acknowledge state employees in speeches and with awards and hold employee recognition events

Hiring and Firing People

Most governors place major emphasis on the people they hire to run state government. “Any organizational model will work,” said one governor, “if you get good people.” One chief said, “The critical management decision anybody makes is who you hire for a job.” “Rather than waiting for people to come to you,” emphasized one chief, “you have to reach out and grab the person you want.”

Sometimes the governor delegates the recruitment of agency officials to the appropriate members of the cabinet. Sometimes the governor wants to control these appointments—or at least the more sensitive appointments. In some situations, the chief may recommend one finalist for the position. Sometimes, the governor will make the choice after hearing the views of many advisors. In other cases, the chief may make the final decision. Regardless of who is in charge of a particular recruitment, the purpose is the same: to learn about the candidates’ experience, successes and failures through a vigorous vetting process so their ability to handle

the job can be evaluated. If the search has been thorough, several final candidates will be more than acceptable and the ultimate decision may be based on subtle factors that cannot be completely articulated.

“No matter how well you screen people [for jobs], no matter how well you set up the [personnel] system,” observed one governor, “you are going to make mistakes.” That means the governor—or the chief—will have to terminate some employees. “The most unpleasant thing you have to do,” one governor told his colleagues, “is fire people.” Indeed, nobody likes to fire anyone. And governors, who did not get elected to office by making people unhappy, may find this job particularly distasteful. Consequently, the task of firing a cabinet secretary or department official may well fall to the chief. “He gets to hire,” said one chief. “I get to fire.” Rather than openly firing an employee, the employee may be given the opportunity to resign. “We’ve had a number of resignations in my administration,” continued the governor quoted above, “but nobody’s been fired.”

MANAGING THE UNEXPECTED

A governor is responsible for ensuring that his or her state is adequately prepared for man-made and natural emergencies and disasters of all types and sizes. These emergencies and disasters will likely be handled at the local level, and a few will require a presidential disaster declaration or attract worldwide media attention. Yet governors must be as prepared for day-to-day events—tornadoes, power outages, industrial fires and hazardous materials spills—as for catastrophes on the scale of Hurricane Katrina or the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Governors should clearly define roles and responsibilities for themselves, their chiefs of staff, their communications directors and other key staff during a disaster or an emergency. The most important role of the governor is to set realistic expectations among survivors and provide comfort through words and actions. Governors have unique access to the media and should use it to provide information to the public through scheduled press briefings, televised appearances and radioannouncements.

Often the chief serves as a secondary media contact for the governor’s office, especially during emergency situations. As an extension of the governor, the chief is well-positioned to meet this occasional need. A more important media role for the chief is to serve as the “enforcer” of state government efforts to convey a single message to the media during a disaster or an emergency. Although this role typically is performed by the communications staff during small or moderately sized incidents, larger incidents may require additional assistance. In this event, the chief can help ensure that cabinet officials and other members of the governor’s staff know the correct media protocols and messages during a disaster or an emergency.

Every governor’s office has a formal plan for emergencies, which can range from natural

disasters to prison breaks. This plan covers everything from the initial response to who should tell the press what to who should talk to the governor. Usually, the chief will have a formal role in that plan. Regardless of what the plan says, the chief inevitably will be drawn into the crisis. Indeed, the crisis is a crisis precisely because it cannot be handled in a routine way; management of that crisis will require actions and decisions not included in the formal emergency plan. When this happens, the chief role becomes even more important and central.

Establishing Standard Operating Procedures

The chief's first step is working with the governor and administration officials to develop standard processes for managing crises. A critical element of this plan concerns access to the governor. Specifically, who first informs the governor of the crisis? One governor emphasized the central role of the chief in crisis management: "When you [the governor] get a call about an emergency, you should get it from your chief of staff. You have a tendency to want to do what the sheriff, mayor, etc., wants done. To ensure that you get the call from the chief, you need to establish a clear procedure for handling all emergencies. Then you won't get called by someone in a way that doesn't give you all the facts or all the options or that puts pressure on you to act precipitously."

Pulling Together the Team for Each Crisis

Once a crisis occurs, the chief needs to assemble a team to handle the emergency. Even if the crisis management plan was reviewed only 24 hours earlier, it will not likely apply to the crisis at hand. This is because the plan was designed for a generic crisis, and the real crisis has complications that were never addressed in the plan. Even if the crisis is a type that has occurred before — a hurricane, for example — specifics of the new situation will never mimic the past completely. Consequently, the chief will need to augment the standard crisis management team with people who have the expertise, contacts or status to help deal with the new situation.

Rationing the Governor

The governor is an important symbol and asset during a crisis. Sometimes the governor needs to be immediately and publicly involved. Indeed, the nation's governors have a basic rule for dealing with a crisis. "Do get out to disasters." The governor needs to show personal concern for disaster victims. Moreover, by going to the scene of the disaster, the governor is sending a visible if implicit message to the state's disaster relief team: "I care about this problem." "If there is a crisis in your state, you damn well better be there," said one governor. "You want to be the symbol of leadership in your state." However, there is an important subtlety in crisis management: If the governor is present, he or she is, by definition, in charge. One governor said, "If the governor is in town where the riot is, he or she becomes the negotiator." Another governor cautioned, "Be careful that you don't put yourself in a position where you are not in control of the situation." In some cases, the governor should, in fact, be in charge. In other situations, the governor should not appear to be in charge. During a crisis, the chief must to ration the governor's visibility.

CONCLUSION

The chief is not the leader of the administration, but the first assistant to the leader. Time and time again, governors' chiefs stress that their primary job is to serve the governor. Inevitably the governor and the chief share more than just the job of governing and achieving the governor's agenda. They share the victories and defeats, the tensions and trivialities and the frustrations and accomplishments. Sharing the highs and lows of their jobs establishes a bond that links them together in ways not found between many superiors and subordinates. As one governor explained, "A governor needs to have one single point of responsibility, accountability and coordination. Obviously this individual is the chief of staff." Despite all the challenges, demands and stress, chiefs of staff seem to love their job. "It's the best job I've ever had," remarked one chief.

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APPENDIX: RESPONSES TO 2018 "MANY ROLES OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF" SURVEY

"Are there additional important roles that you believe should be highlighted to help future governors and their chiefs better understand the chief of staff's role?"

- Proper care and maintenance of the governor — knowing what he/she needs and does not need to stay energized and focused. This is important. Similar skills are required for maintaining optimal cohesion among the cabinet and senior staff
- There is real emotional intelligence required of a good chief of staff
- Cabinet management. Legislative relations. Management of Office of the First Spouse.
- Legislative strategist
- The chief of staff plays a role in developing legislative strategy, but it's a team approach
- The Lt. Governor and I both supervise agency directors and split the duties of managing state government operations from the governor's officer
- The chief of staff should be well versed in crisis incident command and emergency management. Responding to a crisis can make or break a governor
- There are so many roles played by a chief of staff, it is impossible for one person to tackle. Therefore, it is important to assemble a team that together can accomplish all of them
- The chief of staff is most likely to engage on the governor's behalf with key constituencies, business leaders, civic leaders, religious leaders, etc.
- The chief of staff has his hand in all personnel issues in the governor's office and high priority personnel issues in state agencies
- Intergovernmental relations with federal entities, other branches of state government, etc.
- Bridge to campaign and political organizations

"What are the greatest challenges of the chief of staff position?"

- Not permitting the crisis of the day to cannibalize the other good things on the schedule.
- It is challenging to both maintain the high level of confidence required to do the job, while being open to listening to others and changing direction if circumstances warrant.
- You have to be comfortable knowing that you cannot possibly be on top of every part of the job at all times.
- Juggling diverse personalities and opinions.
- Social media management, firestorms, managing access to the governor
- Responding and orchestrating appropriate cabinet and staff to correct or address misinformation and public reactions caused by social media sources
- If someone could move the Earth a little further from the sun, I would appreciate an extra hour or two in each day. More seriously, finding time to manage my own energy-getting exercise, finding time to recharge with my family and time to just think and reflect. This last point is key — to be a good chief of staff one must have time to think; you can't always be on the frontline.
- To do the job of chief of staff successfully you must be in constant contact with the governor so that you can succinctly and accurately describe challenges and opportunities and understand the governor's decisions to provide clear actionable direction

- Prioritize to thrive. Multitasking and managing to the highest level without getting wrapped up in the smaller details of every issue.
- There are constantly moving pieces and parts that you must juggle as you close the loop on one issue other issues open. You must be able to be able to delegate and trust and empower your staff. Finally, while you're juggling all this you need to continually motivate and encourage your staff, while also maintaining order and operational command.
- The volume of issues is both a challenge and part of what makes the job so interesting.
- The fast pace changes in my schedule and the governor's schedule each day, requests made for approvals from staff, keeping up with email requests, and making sure staff is keeping work/life balance as much as possible.
- Managing key governor's staff members and cabinet directors to ensure that the governor's agenda is implemented and promoted.
- The greatest challenge is being on top of all the different issues and ensuring the governor is informed. It's the chief's job to make sure the governor is prepared when he is speaking the public, the media, the legislature, etc.
- Managing staff to ensure that they are most effective in their jobs they are performing to serve the governor.
- Balancing time between managing the governor's office and working with cabinet.
- Determining which issues I should handle myself and which issues should be delegated.
- Implementing long term goals (and being able to work on them day in and day out) vs. addressing day to day issues and short-term problems. It is too easy to be subsumed by immediate needs.
- Personnel issues are a constant time demand.
- Managing the governor's agenda with legislative partners
- Convincing media outlets to report the governor's positive impact on the state
- Working effectively with departments to carry out the governor's agenda.
- Establishing up a system where the right issues are elevated at the right time is very difficult.

"How often do you rely upon the following senior staff member(s) or cabinet official(s) in order to effectively perform your many roles and responsibilities?"

