

# **FIRST 100 DAYS**

## **AS A CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER: BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION**

## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

Suggested Citation: The Council of Chief State School Officers. 2018.  
*First 100 Days as a Chief State School Officer: Building a Strong Foundation*. Washington, D.C.

## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Carissa Moffat Miller, Executive Director





One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20001-1431  
Phone (202) 336-7000 • Fax (202) 408-8072 • [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)



© 2018 by CCSSO. *First 100 Days as a Chief State School Officer: Building a Strong Foundation*. is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Introduction .....	2
How to use this guide.....	3
 <b>Bring People Together: Lay the Groundwork for Successful Stakeholder Engagement .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Action (1): Make initial outreach to key stakeholders across the state.....	4
Suggested stakeholders to reach out to early on in your tenure .....	5
Action (2): Get into the field.....	6
Action (3): Develop a strategy for ongoing communication with external stakeholders and the field.....	6
 <b>Craft and Share a Vision: Be Purposeful and Rational About the Why Before You Get to the What.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Action (1): Get the lay of the land .....	8
Action (2): Understand how success is being measured .....	9
Action (3): Identify your priorities and make them known .....	9
 <b>Unlock Potential Across the SEA: Intentionally Engage and Empower Staff .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Action (1): Get to know your staff and the SEA culture .....	11
Questions to consider as you get to know your staff and the inner workings of the agency .....	12
Action (2): Build your leadership team.....	12
Action (3): Identify your ideal agency culture and model desired behaviors for staff.....	13
Action (4): Once you understand the agency's current culture and priorities, don't be afraid to make necessary changes in staffing and structure .....	14
Action (5): Put structures in place to support strategic internal communications.....	14
 <b>Grow as a Leader: Be Intentional About Reflecting on Your Leadership.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Action (1): Reflect on and be thoughtful about how you spend your time.....	16
Action (2): Find mentors and ask for help.....	17
Action (3): Identify areas of personal growth .....	17
Parting words.....	17
Planning For Action .....	18
Additional Resources.....	20

# FIRST 100 DAYS AS A CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER: BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

---

## Introduction

State chiefs play a central role in ensuring that our schools and educators meet the needs of all learners they serve. Achieving this objective is a great responsibility and requires strong leadership, beginning the moment you take office.

The Council of Chief State School Officers' approach to providing leadership programming and resources is grounded in the [Leadership Playbook](#). The *Leadership Playbook* describes a model of inspirational leadership to support chiefs as they navigate the unique challenges and opportunities in their role. Using input and feedback from current and former chiefs, we identified a set of values and four imperatives that serve as a framework and approach to leadership:

- **Bring people together** by forging relationships built on trust, engaging beyond your core network, and supporting stakeholders as they lead.
- **Craft and share a vision** by co-creating it with your stakeholders, embedding it in your agency's operations, and maintaining focus and alignment around it.
- **Unlock potential across the SEA** by setting an example, fostering autonomy so all can lead, and supporting and developing your staff.
- **Grow as a leader** by developing self-awareness, asking for help, and focusing your energy for impact.

Recognizing the distinct challenges facing chiefs early in their tenure, we consulted with a group of current and former chiefs to focus on the critical first few months of a chief's tenure, which is undoubtedly an exciting—but incredibly demanding—time. The first 100 days in office are critical to ensuring success throughout your tenure and require balancing many demands while also making important decisions that will set the agency's path for the years ahead. The first three months in office are a commonly used timeframe during which leaders are held accountable for making initial progress toward goals they have set and to create a sense of urgency around the foundational decisions leaders must make and implement.

This guide relays advice from those who have stood in your shoes. We distilled chiefs' reflections on their own first 100 days in office into key actions for you to consider, along with their tips and advice, and the insights and wisdom they have gained throughout their tenure. In your first days in office, you will confront seemingly endless requests for your time and attention, and may be overwhelmed with information, resources, meeting requests, and a burgeoning to-do list. This guide is intended to help you prioritize and focus your time and energy where your efforts can have the most impact during this critical time.

## How to use this guide

The purpose of this guide is to serve as a resource for you when you are first appointed or elected as chief, and through your first months in office as you build the foundation for your tenure. We recognize that leaders enter into the chief role with diverse backgrounds and into states with varying governance structures and political landscapes. Therefore, some actions and tips included in this resource may be more applicable than others. We encourage you to prioritize the suggested actions based on your own context.

Organized around the four leadership imperatives from CCSSO's *Leadership Playbook*, we have identified several core actions that chiefs recommend after reflecting on their first 100 days in office. Within each core action, you will find tips and examples of how to approach specific tasks.

This guide is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather is intended to inform your decision-making process in your own context. And while the action steps and tips are laid out as distinct, they are interconnected and build on each other, not necessarily in chronological order. Some of the tips may seem obvious or common sense but were identified by chiefs as important to include in this guide, because in their experience, often the most obvious actions can be overlooked during such a busy time.



## Bring People Together: Lay the Groundwork for Successful Stakeholder Engagement.

Regardless of your background or how you came to be a state chief, early outreach efforts to key stakeholders are critical. You will want to establish practices to help turn new connections into long-term relationships, while continuing to strengthen existing relationships.

### Action (1): Make initial outreach to key stakeholders across the state.

Prioritize establishing relationships with those outside of your known circles, while also honoring those who have shown themselves to be your champions. Set up initial meetings with stakeholders to begin building relationships and conclude each meeting by providing stakeholders with a point of contact within your state agency for follow-up. Your key objectives at this early stage are to listen and establish trust, as this is only the beginning of your engagement efforts. Establishing these early relationships will allow you to more easily seek input and feedback on specific issue areas in the future and provide ongoing communication to stakeholders about the work of the State Education Agency (SEA). Keep in mind that stakeholder relationships with your predecessor, healthy or strained, do not transfer to you.

#### Tips

- o Ask trusted advisors to help you identify the key influencers who will have an impact on your policies and decisions. Have them make introductions or broker relationships.
- o As you meet with stakeholders for the first time, be prepared to speak briefly about your priorities as well as learn their priorities, solicit feedback, and explore ways that these stakeholders can become engaged in the work to come.
- o Ask stakeholders to reflect on their experiences with the SEA in order to understand how the agency is viewed and what you might need to do in response to that perception.
- o Prioritize outreach to advocacy groups that have not traditionally been invited to the conversation. Consider civil rights organizations or organizations that represent students of color, for example. If your position is a partisan office, consider reaching across the aisle to individuals and organizations that typically partner with the opposite political party. While you may not always agree, work to identify any common ground with these groups.
- o Establish a plan to follow up with stakeholders after your initial meeting.
- o Assign a staff member to serve as liaison to the board, legislature, and/or other key stakeholders once relationships have been established. Empower staff to maintain these critical relationships and continuously provide staff with enough information to successfully serve as your ambassadors.

**Example:** If there is a deputy who has served at your SEA for a long time, ask them to help prioritize which district superintendents to visit first and to introduce you on those visits.

**Example:** Identify a person on your team who knows your priorities well and who you trust to speak on your behalf. Ask them to take the lead to initiate follow-up conversations and ongoing relationship building with stakeholders, and to keep you informed.

**Example:** Give out your cell phone number or email address and be sure to share the contact information of the key points of contact on your staff.

- o Leverage annual conferences and regularly occurring meetings to introduce yourself. Many states have summer and fall conferences of school boards, business officials, legislators, and others that you should plan on attending, and your staff should work to make sure you have time to speak on the agenda.

### Suggested stakeholders to reach out to early on in your tenure

- o Governor and the governor’s education policy advisor – These are key relationships, but it is also helpful to have good relationships with the administrative and scheduling staff for the governor, as they often serve as a gatekeeper.
- o Legislators – Be targeted in your outreach. The chairs, vice chairs, and minority party leads of both chambers as well as the education and appropriations committees are particularly important.
- o State board members (in states with state boards) – These relationships will be a priority if you are appointed by the state board, but individual outreach is important even if you are elected or appointed by the governor.
- o Superintendents – Ensure geographic and demographic diversity in the districts you engage with.
- o Commissioners of other key state agencies – These could include the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services, and any business and/or workforce development agencies.
- o Directors of the various state-level professional education associations – Including the associations representing teachers (typically teachers’ unions), superintendents, principals, and locally-elected school boards.
- o Higher education – Higher education boards such as a board of regents, if applicable, along with presidents and provosts of important colleges and universities, both public and private.
- o Business community – The state chamber of commerce and other business and workforce development associations. Seek advice from your career technical education director on who to connect with regarding career readiness issues, as well as consult your policy staff to identify other groups, including large businesses in the state and large foundations.
- o Advocacy leaders – Prioritize those that have not traditionally been engaged with the SEA. For example: Civil rights organizations, Urban League, UnidosUS chapters, special education groups.
- o Media – Ask your communications director to get a list of journalists covering education at the state level and set up time for you to meet with these reporters and editorial boards across the state.
- o SEA staff – Staff should also be considered stakeholders and engaged early and often. See “Unlock Potential Across the SEA” on page 11.

**Example:** Invite legislators to breakfast or host a legislative reception at your SEA offices. You also can invite legislators to attend a school visit in the community with you.

**Example:** If appointed by the board, send individual thank you notes to members.

**Example:** Call a meeting of all of the association leaders in the state to introduce yourself.

## Action (2): Get into the field.

Where you go gets noticed, so be strategic in your first 100 days, identify the superintendents, school districts, and public charter schools (if your state has them) you want to visit, and set a realistic goal for how many visits you will be able to make. Be strategic and spread these visits throughout geographic regions, diverse communities, and low-performing and high-performing schools.

### Tips

- o Make visits within your first 6 months if possible. Set targets for being in the field regularly after that.
- o Think beyond visiting only the largest or highest-achieving districts. Identify which superintendents are most vocal, most influential and respected, most innovative, etc., and prioritize visiting the districts they represent.
- o Be sure that classroom visits are part of any travel out to the districts. Schedule time with teachers and district leaders on-site as well, but be sure to get into actual classrooms.
- o Ask superintendents, principals, and teachers about their interactions and perception of the SEA. Chiefs have used satisfaction surveys to solicit this feedback, and some have done listening tours.
- o Keep track of the school- and district-level strategies you see in action. This will help inform your work and capture stories for future speeches and presentations.
- o Schedule visits to local schools in the mornings. This a good time to engage with students, principals, and teachers over breakfast or just as the school day is beginning. Set aside time at lunch to meet with a group of students.

**Example:** Conduct a “Superintendent Roadshow” and target a handful of larger venues over the first 6 months and continue regular roadshows.

**Example:** One former chief called every superintendent the day they were appointed, visited every region within their first month on the job, and visited every district within the first year.

**Example:** Identify what listservs or newsletters exist within the SEA to reach the field (including teachers) and work with your communications team to build or update contact lists and centralize these communications channels.

## Action (3): Develop a strategy for ongoing communication with external stakeholders and the field.

Having a proactive communication and engagement strategy that allows for two-way communication and external feedback will encourage collaboration and continuous improvement as well as foster relationships, and hopefully improve policy formation and implementation.

### Tips

- o Build a relationship with your SEA’s communications director. Learn about your SEA’s key communications channels, audiences, successes, and challenges.
- o Create consistent, central communication channels from your SEA to improve and streamline the messages sent to the field.
- o Set up regular structures for engaging stakeholders. Establish advisory councils/ committees when it makes sense to do so. Build from existing committees or take initial steps to form them if they do not exist, and schedule regularly occurring meetings to get a better picture of the field.

**Example:** Common councils include parents, superintendents, and principals. Invite parents who previously submitted complaints to the SEA to join the parent advisory committee.

**Example:** Depending on the size of your state, consider regional committees.

**Example:** Even if elected, provide your governor or board with regular updates as your thinking evolves in your strategic planning process. Build relationships with their key staff, and proactively ask for input before moving too far ahead.



- o As you build relationships with certain stakeholders, consider informal communications channels to keep in contact. Never forget, however, that communications, such as emails and text messages, done in the performance of your duties, are public documents and may be subject to Freedom of Information Act requests. Never put anything in writing, whether in an email or text message, that you would not want to have appear in the newspaper the next day.
- o Create a set of talking points for you and your key ambassadors to use in conveying your goals and priorities.
- o When sharing your vision, remember it's new to others. Be sure to repeat the same message multiple times to different audiences to ensure it resonates. Be ready to discuss how others play a role in the implementation of your vision, especially if it requires a change in how work is currently done.
- o Take advantage of the media's initial interest in you as a new statewide official and use this as an opportunity to share your vision and priorities and be proactive. Seek external speaking engagements that align with your message and use these opportunities to share your high-level vision for students and the agency. ..... **Example:** Add a video message to your website within one month. Keep it simple- "I am grateful to be in this position, I look forward to working with teachers and principals," and then state your key priorities.
- o Develop a social media presence to stay proactive and create your own voice. .... **Example:** Host regular conference calls with superintendents and conduct town halls and virtual twitter town halls.



## Craft and Share a Vision: Be Purposeful and Rational About the *Why* Before You Get to the *What*.

It is important to understand the existing work of the system and decide what to build on, what to stop, and how your priorities will fit. Take the first steps to identify and outline your vision and top priorities and share it for feedback, or if elected, begin to shift your message to how you will implement your campaign vision. The vision is instrumental, as it will guide the formation of an agency strategic plan and aligned implementation plans.

### Action (1): Get the lay of the land.

You have to do a lot of groundwork and research early on to show that you are knowledgeable and understand your state's historical and political context. Doing a landscape analysis will help you balance your own priorities and vision with existing priorities and situations within the state. Don't upend the work of the SEA before you build your understanding.

#### Tips

- o Understand the current priorities and work of the SEA. Review the agency's most recent strategic plan, related planning documents and work plans, press releases, and examine the agency's website carefully.
- o Review any existing strategic planning documents or work plans from the state board and/or the governor's office and compare these to the SEA's most recent strategic plan. Understand how they currently fit and work together (or don't) and determine the degree to which they should be further aligned.
- o Ask the leadership team and each division lead to prepare a short briefing paper for you outlining major accomplishments of the past year, top three priorities for the division, and major issues they face. This allows you to get a quick feel of the SEA as perceived by the staff.
- o Familiarize yourself with the politics surrounding key issues, including your state's accountability system, learning standards, teacher evaluation system, and school funding formulas.
- o Be prepared to become familiar with the budget and budgeting process, and your responsibility as state chief in that process.
- o Learn what legislation is in play when you enter, identify key bills, and plan your response. If you are planning your own legislation, seek guidance from trusted advisors who can help you navigate the legislative process.

**Example:** When inheriting the department's outdated strategic plan as well as the state board's existing priorities, one chief pro-actively engaged the board and other key stakeholders to co-create one plan for education in the state rather than diluting priorities across multiple plans and documents.

- o Take advantage of opportunities to learn what other states are doing. Learn from your peers, including successes and challenges to inform your own vision and goal setting.

### Action (2): Understand how success is being measured.

Identify the key metrics that are used, both by the agency and by other policymakers, to determine how well the state’s education system is functioning in terms of outcomes for students. What are the key outcomes that need to be measured, and how accurate are the measurement tools that are being used?

#### Tips

- o Review the data collected by the SEA and determine the degree to which these data can be used to accurately assess how well the state is doing in achieving its goals for students.
- o Build a relationship with the SEA’s chief information officer to learn more about the state’s data system, how it operates, and its successes and challenges.
- o Review how the SEA’s data are being used by the field, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Are the data accurate and up-to-date? Are they being interpreted in the right way? Is there more the SEA could be doing to help make the data more accessible?
- o Use data to anchor conversations with the field and staff and drive your early decision making.

**Example:** If one of the desired goals is for “95% of third graders to read at or above grade level,” ask what data elements and metrics exist that are being used to measure and support this goal.

**Example:** When meeting with superintendents, ask them to reflect on data, discuss what progress they anticipate this year, and what support they need from the SEA to improve. Ask them what new data elements might be necessary to enable them to better target support, capacity, and infrastructure to close opportunity gaps and improve outcomes for all students.

### Action (3): Identify your priorities and make them known.

A full strategic planning process will be a longer-term endeavor, but it is important to share your priorities early and clearly indicate the “North Star” that will guide your overarching vision for advancing student outcomes in your state. Sharing your personal story and an aspirational vision for education in your state will help to build trust as well as provide a sense of direction for the state and SEA during your transition.

#### Tips

- o Create a clear, consistent message that shows how your aspirations are grounded in what’s right for students. Use this as the anchor for establishing your priorities.
- o Seek out an “early win” policy solution to advance your vision that garners broad support and establishes common ground with stakeholders and policymakers.
- o Be strategic about how you tackle controversial issues in the beginning, as you risk creating tension or political battles without the political capital you may need to make headway.

**Example:** Consider easy fixes that might not need legislative or state board approval, but perhaps an internal policy change that garners support or alleviates bureaucracy.

**Example:** Identify three things that all superintendents want changed and set out to get that done.

**Example:** Give careful thought to legislation you intend to propose and prioritize it. Could a potentially controversial piece of legislation wait until a future session when it may stand a better chance?

- o Your message needs to cascade. Once you have identified your own priorities for the SEA, ask each division how they can contribute to the overall strategic plan. This will build buy-in and help staff see how their work connects to the vision and contributes to achieving the priorities you've established for the agency.





## Unlock Potential Across the SEA: Intentionally Engage and Empower Staff.

External requests for your time and urgent issues will require your attention, but do not let those things jeopardize the time you spend in the SEA building a foundation of trust with and among your staff. The people within the agency are your most valuable resource and will require your attention and investment of time in these early days.

### Action (1): Get to know your staff and the SEA culture.

As you are developing and implementing your vision and learning the lay of the land, it is important that you are simultaneously getting to know staff and gaining an understanding of the nature of their work. Be sure to devote time to your staff. Learn about their work and their roles to gain insight into SEA operations, the culture and the values driving the work, and staff perceptions of the agency's role in achieving outcomes for students.

#### Tips

- o Meet with the members of the leadership team, program directors, and others who lead the agency's work. You likely cannot reach all staff or teams, so commit to meeting with all staff after the first three months. Even if you have been at the SEA prior to becoming chief, do not forget that you play a new role and are seen differently by staff.
- o Acknowledge that staff may be fearful of change and concerned about their job security. Keep this in mind as you get to know your staff and build relationships.
- o Share your aspiration and priorities with staff before external stakeholders to build trust and transparency. Listen to staff feedback on your vision and follow-up to let them know how you took it into account. Be intentional in sharing the vision consistently both internally and externally. Remember that you can move only as fast as the speed of trust.
- o As you discuss your vision, be prepared to discuss with staff what implementing that vision may mean for them and the work they do. Engage them in a dialogue about what needs to change to achieve the vision.
- o Consider engaging an external partner to conduct a formal agency needs assessment or capacity review to provide a more thorough analysis of the agency and give you a solid baseline on the agency's internal capacity and culture.

**Example:** Host an all-staff meeting as early as possible.

**Example:** To make yourself visible and approachable to staff, consider something like greeting staff at the front door when they arrive to work in the morning one day or put time on the calendar to walk around the building.

**Example:** Your message to staff when you are first getting to know them will be different depending on the climate of the department. If you enter after a tumultuous series of transitions, it's important to offer stability early on.

### Questions to consider as you get to know your staff and the inner workings of the agency:

- ? Has the agency developed, and internalized, a set of shared values that guides how work is done by everyone at the agency?
- ? Are the agency's processes, structures, and policies aligned to implement the vision and do individuals at all levels of the agency understand how their work connects to the vision?
- ? Do individuals work across teams and offices to effectively implement cross functional, and/or agency goals and strategies?
- ? Are staff trusted to make decisions and empowered to take innovative action guided by the agency's values and vision?
- ? Do policies and practices at the agency express care and concern for staff well-being, including encouraging staff to get to know each other as people and celebrate successes?
- ? Are staff provided opportunities to develop and work on the most interesting/impactful projects?

### Action (2): Build your leadership team.

In these first days, it is critical to identify the core people you can trust who share your vision for the work to come. This "kitchen cabinet" (members of which may or may not hold formal leadership roles in the agency) will be instrumental to helping you understand the agency and the work, and can give you trusted guidance in navigating your first few months. Your more formal leadership team will evolve over time as you get to know the staff and fill key positions, but this trusted group will help you to develop your initial understanding of the agency and help inform your decision making.

#### Tips

- o Your leadership team should include people that can serve in the following ways:
  - A deputy or chief of staff who can serve as a surrogate in messaging and has authority to make decisions internally and externally;
  - A communications director who can craft and create messages for internal and external audiences;
  - A chief financial or budget officer who knows the budget inside and out;
  - A legislative liaison who can manage legislative relationships;
  - A chief academic officer who can speak to the core teaching and learning work of the agency;
  - A chief legal counsel; and



- A chief information officer who can speak to the agency’s data and information systems.
- o Assess the leadership team and structure that you are inheriting from your predecessor. If applicable, determine the best way to integrate staff you are bringing into the existing team. Ask yourself the following questions to gain a better understanding of the leadership team:
  - Does the team work effectively?
  - To what degree are the team members you inherited on board with the direction you plan to take?
  - Does the team structure lend itself to effective agency leadership?
- o Think about how you want the team to work together, not just what you want it to accomplish. Set the tone for the meetings and group dynamics in these first days by creating norms and routines, and clarifying your expectations.
- o As you come to know the team and fill key positions, begin to align leadership roles and structures with your priorities. Keep an eye out for talented people who are not in leadership roles and consider how you might put them in roles of authority.
- o Work with relevant human resources or administrative staff to understand the degree of flexibility you have to move staff around and make organizational changes. Understanding the power you do and do not have in this regard will be critical to future planning.
- o Make sure you have an outstanding administrative assistant and support staff—they can make or break you! The importance of this relationship cannot be overstated, as your support staff acts as your gatekeeper, supports you as you execute your priorities, and often helps to shape impressions of you and build external relationships. Consider and decide relatively quickly whether you would benefit from the consistency and institutional knowledge of the support staff you would inherit from your predecessor, or whether to bring in new staff.

**Example:** If you had a transition team, consider keeping them on as an advisory group.

**Example:** Structure team meeting agendas around your priorities and set the expectation that meetings will focus on progress, performance, and problem-solving.

**Example:** Think of the message that is sent when you fill key positions and make early staffing decisions. Each decision sends a message.

### Action (3): Identify your ideal agency culture and model desired behaviors for staff.

Be clear from the start about the kind of leader you plan to be, what your values and priorities are, and what you see as the core values the agency needs to ground the work and live by in order to achieve the vision.

#### Tips

- o Communicate—and model—what you believe to be the most important aspects of organizational culture. You cannot repeat these elements too often.

- o Commit to a process for identifying department-wide values—the values that will ultimately drive how the agency does its work—with the understanding that these core values will be integrated into your strategic plan. These values should encapsulate the agency’s deepest beliefs about what is important, help guide agency decision making, and form the basis for accountability and continuous improvement.
- o Identify leaders (including staff outside of the leadership team) within the SEA who share your vision for the culture and encourage them to promote these behaviors and expectations throughout the agency both informally and formally.

**Example:** Use one of your first management meetings to focus on “the how.” Together the team can discuss expectations for how people should communicate, behave, and engage with one another.

**Action (4): Once you understand the agency’s current culture and priorities, don’t be afraid to make necessary changes in staffing and structure.**

After you have a sense of the work of the agency and the staff, consider whether changes need to be made to improve outcomes or to better align the agency’s work to your priorities.

**Tips**

- o Look at talent, temperament, and overall fit for key positions, understanding that you may have to make personnel changes. Once you have a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, and the leadership team especially, do not be afraid to let someone go, as it is much better to do it early on than to wait.
- o There can be pressure to make decisions early and quickly, but for some hires, like your deputy, it can be wise to take your time.
- o It may become clear that larger structural changes and reorganization is needed, and while you likely won’t take that on in the first few months, maintain transparency and open communication around the ways that the agency’s structure may be a barrier to achieving needed outcomes.

**Example:** Sometimes the hardest people to let go can be the most important people to remove. They are the people that are competent at their jobs but are cultural cancer—hard to work with, and often who have created fiefdoms. If you can remove those people, it signals that something matters beyond just performance.

**Example:** Consider waiting to restructure until after the full strategic planning process has concluded, making it easier to organize the agency around your recently articulated priorities.

**Example:** Learn from SEAs in other states of similar sizes and demographics to see how they are organized.

**Action (5): Put structures in place to support strategic internal communications.**

Communications to staff should connect back to your vision and values. Starting early in your tenure, make sure that information is shared consistently and transparently throughout the agency in both directions—from staff and leadership.

**Tips**

- o Work with the communications team to create a consistent channel for internal communications, such as an intranet site, newsletter, blog, weekly email, and/ or regular staff meetings.

**Example:** Highlight success stories and celebrate excellence.

**Example:** The format of the communications should be consistent and whenever possible should make reference to your vision and values.



- o Recognize that outside of your core leadership team, staff may not be as comfortable coming to you and may see hierarchy as an obstacle to open communication. Make it clear that you want to get to know and be responsive to staff.
- o Establish norms for leadership team meetings and set expectations around who will be able to participate and what will be shared following leadership team meetings i.e. the agenda, notes, etc.

**Example:** Give your cell phone number to key staff.

**Example:** Establish quarterly “director’s roundtable” meetings to meet directly with directors in small groups. These meetings have the potential to bring things to your attention that you would not learn otherwise.

**Example:** Create a management council to tackle some of the issues that staff raise, including organizational management issues as well as cross-divisional issues. Use it as a mechanism for issues to rise up to leadership.





## Grow as a Leader: Be Intentional About Reflecting on Your Leadership.

Strategically manage your time and dedicate space for self-reflection and personal development, even in these demanding first 100 days. Leaders often put themselves last and sacrifice their personal time and families, and risk losing track of what really motivates them. You'll be a better leader if you take care of yourself and model the behaviors and practices you expect from your staff, including prioritizing your own growth and continuous improvement.

### Action (1): Reflect on and be thoughtful about how you spend your time.

To the degree that you can, determine the proportion of time you want to spend focusing internally on the agency, as opposed to how much time you want to spend externally in school visits and connecting with stakeholders. Striking the right balance will be difficult, but setting targets for your time will help you to avoid neglecting your staff while you are out on the road or vice-versa. How you prioritize your time will depend on your unique context and will likely evolve over time.

#### Tips

- o Regularly review your calendar work with your support staff to ensure you are scheduling in alignment with your priorities, rather than letting your schedule be driven by others. Set a regularly occurring appointment with your support staff and/or leadership team to review your calendar to manage your time for the coming week(s).
- o To help ensure that you are maintaining focus on your goals, consider sharing a bulleted list of your priorities with staff and ask them to help you stay accountable.
- o It's OK to say, "No." You may feel pressure to accept every invitation and request during your first months in office, but it is important to use your vision and priorities to guide your commitments and ensure that when you are committing to something, it meets certain criteria related to your goals. Focus your energy where you will have greatest impact and think beyond just your short-term goals or the most visible priorities.
- o Lean on your staff and delegate when you can. Provide staff with the information and autonomy needed to represent you and make decisions.
- o Do your best to maintain a healthy work/life balance and model this for your staff. Continue the routines and activities that made you happy and healthy before entering this role.

**Example:** Chiefs suggest that initially you should aim to spend 60 percent of your time internally and 40 percent externally.

**Example:** Your "kitchen cabinet" of key advisors can be critical in determining how you best use your time. Don't be afraid to ask others for guidance on this.

**Example:** If you enter office during a legislative session, be cognizant not to allow the legislative session to monopolize your time at the expense of other relationships, both internal and external to the SEA.

**Example:** Create criteria for what invitations you accept. For example, does the event in question help advance key priorities, allow you to celebrate the successes of your staff or other stakeholders, or align with or highlight a current initiative or focus area of the SEA.

## Action (2): Find mentors and ask for help.

Current and former chiefs and others in similar leadership roles are an invaluable resource as they have stood in your shoes and understand the unique challenges facing you.

### Tips

- o Engage in networking and relationship building with your peers in other states, as well as with executives both in the education field and outside of it who understand your challenges and role. These are the people you can call on and look to for guidance and advice during a crisis or problem and inform how you lead.
- o Build relationships with former chiefs. Veterans can help you avoid common missteps and overcome obstacles.
- o Your fellow cabinet members may be a source of mutual support, and you may find allies and encouragement from seemingly unlikely places such as district superintendents or your peers in the higher education community.

**Example:** Join professional networks. In addition to CCSSO, chiefs referenced organizations such as Education Commission of the States, National Conference of State Legislatures, regional Comprehensive Centers, and formal executive training programs at institutions of higher education as being helpful to their learning and relationship-building.

## Action (3): Identify areas of personal growth.

Despite the many competing demands for your attention, carve out dedicated time for your own reflection and growth, even in these early days when it may not feel like a priority, or it may feel selfish.

### Tips

- o Develop a set of small goals for your first 100 days and use this to drive and measure your own progress. Continue this routine and set personal goals on a quarterly basis.
- o Encourage and solicit feedback early and often. If appointed by the board or governor, ask what key characteristics made you the top candidate.
- o Do your best to build blocks of time into your schedule—two hour blocks at a minimum—that are just for reading, writing, and reflecting. Hold these sacred.

## Parting words

As you have no doubt come to realize, the role of state chief is a challenging one. You are asked to not only run a large state agency, but to also be the face and voice of the state's aspirations for its students. This is all done in the public spotlight and often under the scrutiny of stakeholders and the media. Your fellow chiefs, many of whom contributed to this document, urged us to create this guide in the belief that getting off to a great start—using these few weeks to introduce yourself, connect with others, set a vision and goals, and begin laying a solid foundation for the work to come—can position you for future success. We hope you find this guide useful and ask that you help us to continue to refine this guide for future chiefs.

## Planning For Action

One of the biggest challenges of your role, especially for new chiefs, is finding enough time to reflect and plan amidst all of the important and urgent work. This template can help you prioritize the work ahead by indicating the specific actions you will take and provide you with a plan to hold yourself accountable. Recognizing that many of the recommended actions will take more than 100 days to accomplish or will be ongoing, use this template to outline your initial steps.

Leadership Imperative	Action	Next-Steps	Target Date
<p><b>Bring People Together:</b> Lay the Groundwork for Successful Stakeholder Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make initial outreach to key stakeholders across the state</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get into the field</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a strategy for ongoing communication with external stakeholders and the field</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Craft and Share a vision:</b> Be Purposeful and Rational About the Why Before You Get to the What</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the lay of the land</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how success is being measured</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify your priorities and make them known</li> </ul>		

**Unlock potential  
across the SEA:**

Intentionally Engage  
and Empower Staff

- Get to know your staff and the SEA culture

- Build your leadership team

- Identify your ideal agency culture and model desired behaviors for staff

- Once you understand the agency's current culture and priorities, don't be afraid to make necessary changes in staffing and structure

- Put structures in place to support strategic internal communications

- Reflect on and be thoughtful about how you spend your time

- Find mentors and ask for help

- Identify areas of personal growth

**Grow as a  
Leader:**

Be Intentional About  
Reflecting on  
Your Leadership

## Additional Resources

- [CCSSO's Unlocking Potential: Strategies for Building a Strong Communications Culture within Your SEA](#) includes guidance and case studies illustrating how to start and sustain an ongoing, agency-wide system of internal communications and engagement.
- [CCSSO's Let's Get This Conversation Started](#) is a guide to stakeholder engagement that includes strategies, tools, examples and resources to help states engage with stakeholders. While it was designed to support states as they developed and implemented their ESSA Plans, the guidance remains applicable today.
- [CCSSO's Let's Continue this Conversation](#) provides guidance on how to turn new stakeholder connections into long-term relationships.
- [CCSSO's State Strategic Vision Guide](#) is a framework and way to approach setting a vision. While it was created specifically for ESSA, it can be applied in other contexts and may be helpful to a new chief embarking on vision setting.
- [CCSSO's Inspirational Leadership Self-Assessment for Chief State School Officers](#) can be used to reflect on your approach to leadership and discern areas of relative strength and growth.





One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001-1431  
voice: 202.336.7000 | fax: 202.408.8072