Growth and Succession

Chapter 5 named Founder's Syndrome as the risk that undoes well-designed governance from the inside, and pointed here for the actual fix. This chapter is that fix, plus the parallel problem of physical growth: what a community actually does once it outgrows the resource base Chapter 4 sized it against.

Colony branching: the real answer to controlled growth

A community can't grow in place indefinitely; Chapter 4's own land, water, and energy figures are sized to a population, not an open-ended one. Hutterite colonies have solved this in practice for over a century, and the model holds up specifically because it's planned years in advance, not improvised once a colony is already too big.

A colony typically seeks a second location once it reaches somewhere around 120 to 130 people, some communities use a threshold closer to 150. The reasoning runs in both directions: too small, and a colony becomes clannish, effectively dominated by one or two families; too large, and there isn't enough real, varied work to go around, and the colony itself becomes genuinely harder to manage and provision. Once the threshold approaches, the "mother" colony begins "branching": purchasing land for a second site and constructing its buildings *before* the actual move, then splitting, roughly half the members relocate to the new "daughter" colony, with movable assets divided as part of the same plan rather than fought over afterward.

How the actual division gets decided

Method varies by group. Some Hutterite communities still decide who moves by casting lots, a deliberate choice to place the decision outside any accusation of favoritism. Most today use discussion and mutual consent through the community's own governance process instead, the same kind of deliberative structure Chapter 5 already covers. Either way, the method is agreed on and understood well before it's actually needed, the same principle this manual applies to every other hard decision.

This is Ostrom's principle 8 (nested structure) from Chapter 5, made concrete: rather than one flat structure trying to govern an ever-larger population, growth becomes a planned multiplication of right-sized units, each still small enough to actually self-govern well.

Leadership succession is wisdom transfer, not a handoff date

Chapter 5's fix for Founder's Syndrome named term limits and real succession planning; this is what that planning actually looks like in practice. The distinction that matters: transferring knowledge, facts, procedures, who to call, how the well pump works, is necessary but not sufficient. What actually lets a successor handle a situation nobody wrote a procedure for is wisdom: the judgment, experience, and discernment a person builds over years of actually doing the job.

The real mechanism for transferring that isn't a clean handoff on a fixed date, it's deliberate overlap: mentoring, cross-training, and shadowing, with the outgoing and incoming person working alongside each other for a real stretch of time before the transition is final. A sudden departure with no overlap is exactly what turns a planned succession into a crisis; overlap is what prevents it.

Integrating members past the founding generation

Chapter 2 covers vetting people who want to join the founding group. A mature community faces a related but genuinely different problem: bringing in new members, or raising children, once the founding period is long over and the people arriving didn't go through that original trial-membership process at all.

Real, documented practice for this stage: assign each new member an actual liaison, not just a welcome; organize work-parties to help with the practical business of settling in; and keep a standing check-in slot in regular meetings so a newer member has a scheduled way to raise something, rather than needing to work up to interrupting an established group's rhythm. A real, temporary power imbalance exists between longtime members and newcomers while trust builds; naming that directly works better than pretending it isn't there.

A real, documented risk: 'by happenstance' instead of 'by intent'

As a community matures, a growing share of its people, children raised there, later joiners who arrived for practical rather than deliberate reasons, may be there by circumstance rather than the same intentional commitment the founders had. Documented experience from real communities is direct about the consequence: once too large a share of the membership isn't genuinely, actively engaged, the community's own coherence erodes, a real threat to lasting indefinitely, and a different failure mode than anything Chapter 2's founding-stage vetting was built to catch.

Sources

- Hutterite colony branching, population thresholds, and the land/building process: Hutterites.org; colony-branching decision methods (lots vs. mutual consent): ResearchGate
- Wisdom transfer vs. knowledge transfer in leadership succession, and overlap as the real mechanism: Center for Creative Leadership
- Real new-member integration practices (liaisons, work-parties, check-ins) and the “by happenstance vs. by intent” risk as a community matures: Foundation for Intentional Community; Foundation for Intentional Community, “Unto the Second Generation”