NATIONAL CENTER FOR
FAMILY PHILANTHROPY

Pursuit of Excellence:
Growing and Learning as a Family Foundation
Overview of Assessment Categories

Note: In general each of the items after the heading is included as a separate element in the Board assessment.

Legacy/Vision/Mission

Legacy/Values: clarity of intent of donor, ongoing discussion or consideration of legacy; capacity to interpret and adapt the legacy; relationship of legacy to current mission; common understanding of family and foundation philanthropic values and history.

Vision: development of a collective vision; understanding of the connection between individual philanthropic dreams and the collective vision; correlation between vision and legacy; consideration of larger questions, such as continuity and geographic focus.

Mission: Clarity and specificity of mission; regularity of review; understanding and agreement by Board members; understanding by family members not on the board.

Governance

Board Organization: regularity and attendance at board meetings; organization and management of board meetings; understanding of board and officer roles and responsibilities; decision making processes articulated and understood; communication; guidelines for board administrative issues (such as expense reimbursement); committee structures and assignments.

Board Development and Renewal: Orientation for new board members; opportunities to learn about the work of the foundation and philanthropy; opportunities to participate in related groups (e.g. Regional associations, affinity groups); use of tools such as a board self assessment or board retreats.

Individual Trustee Roles: Adequacy of nomination and selection process for new trustees; clarity of terms, length of service and age requirements; time and attention of individual trustees to foundation work; clear policies on expense reimbursement and (if applicable) fees or discretionary grants; understanding of individual philanthropic roles distinguished from foundation trustee roles.

Family Roles

Family Dynamics: Family culture: hierarchy or democracy; branches and generations; mutual support or self-reliance; expressing emotions or decision making; conflict management

Family Leadership/Succession: leadership skills currently on the board and in the family; preparing future leaders; access to leadership positions; plans for leadership succession.

Next Generation Involvement: opportunities for participation; access to opportunities to learn; communication; outreach to the next generation by the board; feeling of ownership by the next generation.

Grantmaking/Program

Program And Grantmaking Development: Connection of program to mission, legacy and values; link to current trustee interests; clarity of program goals; link of program to broader community needs; articulation of overall grantmaking objectives; clarity of strategies to achieve objectives; clarity on issues such as types of grants given, geographic limitations; consideration of tools other than grantmaking, such as technical assistance, convening, collaboration.

Grantmaking Process: board discussion of grants process as element of program; clear rules for making decisions on grants before the board; grantmaking conflicts of interest defined and discussed; understanding of information necessary to make informed grant decisions; effective use of committees and staff or consultants to assist in the board's decision making; incorporate lessons learned from past grantmaking into discussions.

Monitoring and Evaluation: process for tracking, monitoring, processing and responding to grantee reports; clarity of reporting and evaluation expectations; summing evaluation data across grantees, incorporate evaluation data into discussion to improve grantmaking, share information on learning with the field, either directly or through grantees.

Community/Nonprofit Communications and Relationships: respectful, responsive relationships with grantees/applicants; clear messages on the interests of the foundation to the appropriate publics; limits of funding; board interactions with potential grantees or experts in the fields of the foundation's interests