

The NCFP Guide to...
**Conflict in
Family
Philanthropy**

**HOW TO NAVIGATE DIFFERENCES
AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS**

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**NATIONAL CENTER FOR
FAMILY PHILANTHROPY**

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Introduction

There's a reason conflict is so common in family philanthropy, and it isn't because families are inherently dysfunctional. It's because collective giving is driven by people who genuinely care about their shared mission and about each other.

That's a valuable combination. It is also complex.

Conflict, handled courageously and with consideration, can deepen trust, surface better ideas, and keep the work honest and based in humility. When members of a family philanthropy name it and work through it, conflict often brings them closer together and better able to practice joyful and effective philanthropy.

This guide is for families, board members, staff members, decision-makers, and advisors who want practical ways to recognize and address conflict to strengthen their relationships and their giving. It draws on the experience of philanthropic families and their advisors who have navigated these challenges themselves and worked together to build more trusting relationships.

Why talk about conflict?

What's the conversation your family or board is not having—but needs to? Chances are it involves an underlying tension or conflict. Conflict, at its core, is what happens when people perceive that their needs, interests, or concerns are threatened. It occurs in every family and every organization. It's not a sign that something has gone wrong; it's more often a sign that someone cares about the very thing someone else is bumping up against.

Family members and others who come together in the family's philanthropy bring their strengths, their passions, and their identities along with them. They also bring their worldviews, working styles, communication skills, and varying levels of self-awareness and empathy. These dynamics can lead to any number of conflicts.

Often, conflict does not result in a big blow up. Instead, it shows up as a pattern of small disagreements that build over time. "It is little things along the way," says Sharmila Rao Thakkar, the former executive director of the Siragusa Family Foundation who now serves as fractional director for other family foundations and has her own consultancy, SRT Advising & Consulting. "When people avoid conversations, it is often because they don't want to disrupt what feels like balance, camaraderie, or ease." For example, board members might avoid certain topics in meetings or lean into being polite instead of being direct.

Conflict in itself isn't bad. It's the avoidance of conflict that can cause trouble. Out of fear or out of love, some families go years or decades keeping their differences under wraps. "Some people honestly believe that if you don't deal with a problem, it will go away—and that isn't true," says one trustee. Avoiding difficult conversations might keep the peace for the moment, but there's a cost in the long term. When board members or other leaders in the family philanthropy suppress their real views out of fear or distrust, they may disengage. And when so much energy is spent managing unspoken tension, it can prevent people from bringing forth their best selves and contributing as thoughtful stewards.

On the flip side, conflict handled well brings people together. Family, board, or staff members who hold genuinely different views, push back on ideas without the situation becoming personal, and still make good decisions have healthy working relationships. Even when things get tense, working through conflict together builds trust and understanding.

And what does that trust bring? Families and boards who trust each other become more discerning grantmakers. They have the potential to build more durable relationships, internally and with the communities they fund. And they model what it looks like to disagree with integrity while staying focused on the change they are creating.

Work With Family Dynamics, Not Around Them

When Katherine Lorenz began leading her family's foundation, the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, she brought her experience leading other organizations and moved "full steam ahead to make changes and improve the organization" with a strong focus on strategy. At her first board meeting, Lorenz realized that "the strategy and visioning work paled in comparison to the need to look at, understand, and respect the family dynamics. In fact, trying to create change triggered more emotions and likely created a more difficult dynamic." Her advice for family philanthropy leaders includes:

- **Work within the family dynamic.** Lorenz spent the first few years of her tenure "trying to ignore family dynamics and work around them." In creating highly structured meetings and policies, "I did not allow space for the conflict," she says. Even when difficult decisions were on the table, Lorenz tried to rush them through a quick majority vote and without too much discussion. "That backfired big time and made many of those conflicts explode in the medium and longer term. Over time, I came to value and recognize how important it is to work *within* the family dynamic and understand the needs of the family. I started facilitating more dialogue and allowing the conflict to play out." However, "there's a fine line between understanding and respecting the role of family dynamics, while not allowing those dynamics to impede our mission."

- **Understand how family history may appear.** “If it’s hysterical, it’s historical,” Lorenz says. “Meaning that if something is causing outsized emotion, the emotion probably isn’t actually about what you’re talking about. As a leader, I learned that when there is total hysteria about the nuance of a program strategy or a budget allocation, for example, we won’t solve the problem by getting granular. We must get back to why we are all here together, what values do we hold, and what we are trying to accomplish as a family.”
- **Be patient.** Change can take longer in an organization when you involve multiple family members. Lorenz urges family philanthropy leaders to be patient with the process. She thinks about planting the seed for change at one board meeting and watering it over several meetings. If tended with care, that change will come.

Common conflicts across the family giving lifecycle

Conflict in family philanthropy tends to cluster around a handful of recurring themes. Knowing them in advance gives a board a better chance of catching them early.

Succession and leadership transition

No one likes to think about their own mortality or of aging out of their leadership or role. Younger generations may feel it's too sensitive a topic to raise with parents or grandparents. Parents may worry the next generation isn't ready or isn't interested in participating in the philanthropy. The result? No one talks about it, which means there is no future plan in place.

Access and board composition

Who gets to participate in the philanthropy, on what terms, and based on what qualifications? Conflict can arise when board composition is driven by branch equity rather than qualifications, when spouses or in-laws join without clear policies in place, or when some members feel they're doing most of the work while others carry equal voice.

Presence of a strong founder

When one personality dominates the board and the rest bend to meet their demands, board or family members stop speaking up. The group loses the diversity of perspectives it needs to do its best work. This can be hard to see from inside it. The dominant person—frequently the founder—often believes they're the most qualified and experienced, and that they are protecting the family legacy (and that may be true!). Yet it deflates the energy and potential of the whole.

Sibling and branch rivalry

Childhood rivalries may not disappear in adulthood. In family philanthropy, these rivalries can show up as competition for relevance, suspicion of favoritism, or long-standing branch rifts projected onto grant decisions or governance questions. “In our family, one

branch is thought of as the bad actors,” one trustee noted. “This perception has rolled down the family line into the kids. Family members assume a hidden agenda instead of getting to know these people as individuals.”

Diverging values, interests, and priorities

As families grow larger and more dispersed, it’s natural for interests to diverge. What the founder cared about may not resonate with rising generations. Members living in different cities may feel disconnected from the philanthropy’s geographic focus. These differences don’t have to divide—they can enrich, yet only if the family has a way to discuss them honestly.

Poor performance and conduct

Sometimes a board member or other leader isn’t showing up: missing meetings or is present but disengaged. Sometimes behavior is actively disruptive, spreading misinformation, steamrolling discussion, or giving others the silent treatment. This type of behavior calls for the board chair and CEO/executive director to address it swiftly.

Sociopolitical polarization

Differences that could once be set aside in service to shared grantmaking are now surfacing in how families define the problems they want to address, who they want to fund, and what language they’re willing to use.

Spectrum of conflict: healthy, unhealthy, and harmful

Not all conflicts are the same. Management expert Patrick Lencioni, founder and president of The Table Group, describes a conflict continuum that any family board can use to orient itself. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1. THE CONFLICT CONTINUUM



At one end is **artificial harmony**: Conflict is present but suppressed, glossed over, or never named. The board appears to get along. Decisions move forward. But underneath, unresolved tension is accumulating. Artificial harmony is the most common pattern in families and boards, and it's deceptive because it can look like things are working.

At the other end is **destructive conflict**, which can look different depending on the personalities and dynamics involved. This is harmful behavior that prevents the board or family from working together joyfully or living up to their philanthropic potential.

In between is the zone of **healthy, constructive conflict**: Where people hold genuinely different views, say what they think, push back without making it personal, and still make decisions together effectively.

How to navigate the three stages of conflict

The most useful way to think about conflict management is not as a single crisis to be handled, but as an ongoing practice with three distinct stages: preparing before conflict happens, catching it early when it first appears, and addressing it when it's already present or ongoing.

Stage one: Prepare before it happens

The best time to work on conflict is before there's a conflict to work on. Family philanthropies that build healthy practices during calm periods are far better equipped when tension arrives.

Define how decisions get made. Many families have never had an explicit conversation about how they make decisions and which method they use for which type of decision (e.g., consensus or majority vote). They assume consensus—and then discover that one dissenting voice can effectively block everything, or that the loudest voice in the room becomes the de facto decision-maker.

Ann Maddox Utterback, former board chair and current board member of the JF Maddox Foundation, describes this as one of her board's most important realizations. "We said we were operating under majority rule before we actually acted that way," she says. "If someone disagreed, we kept trying to bring them around—it was exhausting. We had to name it explicitly: We are majority rule. You will be heard. But if you're the only one who disagrees, we will take the vote and move forward, with all of the board agreeing to support the majority direction."

Her board at times even had a practice of putting the dissenting member in charge of implementing the decision they'd opposed. "That gives that person ownership in the process and project, even if it was something they initially didn't advocate for," she says.

Set group norms. Create a clear statement of what is expected of board members and other leaders: not just their legal and fiduciary duties, but how they engage with one another. Some boards or decision-making bodies develop a formal code of conduct;

others articulate meeting norms together. These norms matter most not when things are going well, but when behavior is testing the group.


One multigenerational family foundation's board meeting agendas include rules such as "No interruption or rebuttal." Stating those rules explicitly on the agenda sets the tone for the meeting and reiterates previously agreed-upon modes of operating.

At the JF Maddox Foundation, one norm the board adopted was a "Ditto Rule:" If you agree with something already said, board members say "ditto" rather than repeat it. Small in concept, and significant in effect. It shortened meetings, signaled that every voice mattered without requiring everyone to restate the same view, and helped the board move through agendas without losing energy listening to repetitive monologues.

Establish clear governance policies.

Governance clarity is one of the most practical conflict-prevention tools a foundation has.

This means policies on board qualifications and eligibility, how spouses and in-laws are included, what happens in cases of divorce, terms and rotation, decision-making authority, and reimbursement. It also means a clear mission and grant guidelines, so there's a reference point when personal agendas emerge.



Governance clarity is one of the most practical conflict-prevention tools a foundation has.

While no one can anticipate every scenario, it's important to have principles in place before a specific situation makes any policy feel personal. For example, Lisa Parker, a third-generation family member and the president and executive director of the Lawrence Welk Family Foundation says, "When we opened the board up to spouses, we came up with a set of guidelines for every potential problem we could think of. One policy we set: If you're divorced or separated for more than six months, the nonfamily spouse has to leave the board."

Keep in mind that while written policies matter, the real value may lie in the conversations required to create them. David Weitnauer, the longtime leader of the R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation, a former NCFP distinguished fellow, and a current philanthropic advisor says, "It's not the policy itself that's most helpful. What's helpful is the group process you go through to develop a shared understanding of your approach to group work. This includes a commitment to honor the approach by holding one another accountable."

Invest in group hygiene. Weitnauer uses the term “group hygiene” to describe the ongoing practices that keep a board healthy over time: regular check-ins with individual members, periodic retreats, and time built into meetings to reflect on how the group is functioning, beyond what decisions need to be made.

“Most boards spend all their time on the business of the foundation and none of it on the health of the group,” he says. “It helps to periodically step back and reflect, ‘How are we doing, and what do we need to tend to?’ The same is true for dedicated time to learn together, reflect, and just break bread. If you wait until there’s a crisis, you’ve waited too long.”

Annual evaluations, grantee perception reports, and brief end-of-meeting check-ins are all good tools, and the practice matters more than the format. What is most important is building a culture in which it is normal, expected even, to ask how things are going and to answer honestly.


Know how each person shows up. The more a family understands its own members—how each person communicates, what frustrates them, what experiences they bring to the work, and what gets in their way—the better prepared they are to work through tough moments. Tools such as personality assessments, working style assessments, and/or facilitated conversations about individual strengths and communication preferences all help build a collective awareness about each other.

Rao Thakkar has found that many families get stuck because they have not made space to talk about three core realities: identity, power, and voice. “Often family members have not reflected on how they show up in the family system and across generations,” she says. “As a result, they may be unsure how to show up in the philanthropy or foundation and question roles and responsibilities.”

That uncertainty can play out in all sorts of ways. For example, family philanthropy leaders may feel stuck in conflict loops tied to much older questions about hierarchy, belonging, and recognition.

The JF Maddox Foundation solves for this by having each board member (family and independent alike) develop a personal profile with three elements: how they want to be perceived, what gets in their own way, and how they offer trust. “I’m the eldest,” says Utterback. “I often want to take over and get things done. Having that named and shared in writing made a real difference in how I understood myself, and how others understood me.”

Consider independent trustees. Nonfamily or community board members can change the boardroom dynamic in ways that are hard to replicate otherwise. “Family members tend to behave differently when there are people in the room whom they respect but who aren’t part of the family system,” says Weitnauer. “Community board members add professional decorum. Their presence can strengthen resolve to minimize distractions from family dynamics.” However, families should not look to independent board members to mediate or manage family conflict. With leadership from the chair, family board members must take responsibility for troublesome dynamics. If the board is unable to manage dynamics constructively, members should consider bringing in a trusted advisor or facilitator.



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Stage two: Catch it early

One of the most useful concepts in conflict navigation is the distinction between a pinch and a crunch.

A pinch is the small aggravation—the moment an expectation is violated, something feels off, or an issue first appears on the horizon. It’s the kind of thing you might talk yourself out of raising because it seems too minor, because you don’t want to make a big deal of it, or because you hope it will pass.

A crunch is what happens when pinches go unaddressed. Small aggravations accumulate, and that can build frustration or resentment. What could have been a five-minute conversation becomes a months-long standoff, or worse, something that disrupts the group dynamic.

Most difficult conversations can be avoided when participants engage in an easier conversation earlier. That means most of the painful, relationship-straining conflict that shows up in family philanthropy was, at some earlier point, something that could have been addressed over coffee or as a facilitated conversation.

Name it. The first step is simply saying something—to yourself, then to the relevant person or the group when the moment is right. This doesn't require a formal process. It can be as straightforward as saying to a colleague after a meeting: "I noticed some tension around that topic. I think it deserves a real conversation."

Nancy Murphy, CEO of CSR Communications, recommends creating normal meeting structures for this—not just in crisis, but as part of how the board operates. "Ask regularly: What are we missing? What's not being said? Build in the invitation for dissent before it turns into opposition."

Check which hat you're wearing. Family members wear more than one hat: as a family member, as a board member, and sometimes as a donor, a staff member, a caregiver, or parent. When conflict arises, it helps to pause and ask: *Which hat am I wearing right now? Am I raising this as a board member with a governance concern or as a parent trying to protect a child? Am I pushing back because I have substantive concerns or because I'm still annoyed about something that happened at the last family gathering?* "Sometimes I have my mom hat on and don't even realize it. Being able to see it, and even laugh about it, takes the charge out of it," says Utterback.

De-escalate in the moment. When conflict erupts, the most important thing a board chair or staff leader can do is slow things down. Call a break. Invite people to breathe. Use open-ended questions to hear different perspectives rather than forcing positions. And resist the urge to push for resolution before the room is ready.

Address conduct directly. If someone is consistently disruptive, dominating discussion, dismissing others, or bringing sidebar conversations back into the room as if they represent consensus, the board chair needs to address it, ideally one-on-one before it becomes a pattern. Poor behavior that goes unnamed tends to escalate.

How a Generational Leadership Transition Helped One Foundation Confront Conflict

As the JF Maddox Foundation board expanded from three directors to nine across multiple branches of the family, conversations became more complicated. Meetings often stalled in circular discussions. “We realized we were churning,” Ann Maddox Utterback recalls. “We couldn’t get to a decision, and nobody was satisfied.”

The family began bringing more structure to its governance. With the help of outside facilitators and advisors, it introduced several practices that gradually transformed how the board worked together. Over time, the board’s perspective on conflict shifted. “We used to think disagreement meant something was wrong,” she reflected. “Now we see it as part of doing the work together.”

Some of the practices the foundation’s board embraced include:

Design better conversations. The board began clarifying the purpose of each discussion before meetings began. Were they brainstorming ideas, narrowing options, or making a decision? This helped prevent members from talking past one another.

Clarify decision-making. For years, the board had operated with an unspoken expectation of consensus. Eventually board members acknowledged that unanimity was unrealistic for every decision. They agreed to move forward with majority decisions once everyone had been heard. “That was a turning point,” Utterback says. “People could still disagree, but we weren’t stuck trying to make everyone happy.”

Recognize the difference between family and governance. The board also began distinguishing between conversations about the business of the foundation and conversations about family dynamics. Simply naming when a discussion was drifting into family territory helped the group reset and stay focused.

Stage three: Manage ongoing conflict

Sometimes conflict has been present for years. Family philanthropy leaders may have worked around it rather than working through it. At this stage it is harder to address conflict, but it is still possible.

Start with the relational layer, not the governance layer. Rao Thakkar is emphatic on this point. “If you try to solve deep relational conflict—an identity and/or trust problem—with a new policy without attention to the underlying family dynamics, you’ll end up with a policy in name only that is difficult to follow.”

Before a board can do better governance work, the family needs to do the deeper work first: understanding each other’s identities and histories within the philanthropy, naming how family dynamics have shaped board behavior, and building enough trust that honest conversation becomes possible. This often means having dedicated conversations about how the group communicates and relates, distinct from the regular business of the board. “You have to secure or build the container before the governance work inside it can succeed,” Rao Thakkar says.

Make time for conflict. One of the most underused tools is the most counterintuitive: Schedule time for hard conversations, not just in crisis, but regularly. Build into the board calendar at least one time per year where people can raise what isn’t working. Give the board explicit permission to say what needs to be said.

“Nobody wants to be the jerk in the room,” observed one trustee. “But sometimes you have to be that person and speak up in order to get things on the table. The board can welcome that dialogue with a ‘Thank you for making us discuss this.’”

Not making time is itself a choice. Important issues pushed to the bottom of the agenda rarely get addressed. If there’s a hard conversation your board needs to have, put it first.

Notice patterns. When does conflict tend to appear? Is it during grant cycles, during leadership transitions, or when certain combinations of people are in the room? When the foundation is navigating external stress—financial pressure, political upheaval, a significant loss? Understanding the conditions that generate conflict helps a board anticipate and prepare rather than just react.

Use retreats strategically. Retreats are one of the most consistently effective tools for families working through difficult dynamics. A two-day off-site may not resolve everything, but it creates the kind of space that regular meetings don’t. People are away from their routines and they have time to go deep. They can work on relationships alongside governance questions.

“Most of our big breakthroughs have happened at retreats,” says Utterback. “You go away, you work on things, you get out of board mode and into people mode. That’s where the real conversations happen.”

Track the health of the group. As stated earlier, annual evaluations of board effectiveness, grantee perception reports, and periodic one-on-one conversations between the board chair and individual members all contribute to a more honest picture.

“If you only measure the foundation’s external impact, you’re missing half the story. The internal functioning of the board is a leading indicator of everything else,” Weitnauer says. “A highly functioning board is more likely to breed empathy and understanding—of staff members, the community being served, partners, and the nature of the work being funded, the sum of which supports better decision-making and greater impact.”

When to bring in outside help

Some families can work through conflict on their own. Others need support. Knowing the difference, and being willing to act on it, is one of the most important skills a board chair or family leader can develop.

A skilled outside facilitator or advisor can do things that family and staff members, no matter how capable, generally cannot. They can hear everyone without being perceived as having a side. They can reflect back what family members cannot say to one another. They can name the pattern that everyone in the room sees but no one is willing to voice.

Families and board members can often hesitate to bring in outside help. Three common misconceptions they hold are:

- **We can handle this ourselves.** This is sometimes true. Often, this is stemming from the same impulse that keeps individuals from seeking help for anything personal—that needing support is a sign of weakness. Bringing in a skilled advisor is a sign of seriousness about the work, not an admission of failure.
- **It will make things worse.** Naming a conflict can initially feel destabilizing. Yet unaddressed conflict will grow. A skilled facilitator knows how to create the conditions for hard conversations without letting them spiral.
- **We don't want an outsider knowing our business.** Philanthropy advisors work under professional confidentiality norms. And the alternative—having the family's internal conflict become visible through dysfunction in the boardroom or through deteriorating grantee relationships—typically leads to more exposure, not less.

Whether you're engaging a philanthropy advisor, a family dynamics specialist, a family therapist, or a governance consultant, look for someone who has experience with both family systems and philanthropic governance. The intersection matters. A facilitator skilled at family dynamics but unfamiliar with foundation governance, or vice versa, may miss important dimensions of the work.

Ask about their approach to conflict specifically: do they work with families proactively, or only in crisis? Do they have experience with multigenerational boards? Are they comfortable naming hard things when they need to be named?

Conclusion

In sum, here are the top five takeaways that you can take back to your family or board.

1. Conflict is not the problem. Avoidance is.

Conflict is healthy and even necessary for good decision-making. What can cause harm to families and philanthropies is conflict that is suppressed, ignored, or never named. The goal is a board or family that can work through disagreement, not one that avoids it.

2. Catch it at the pinch, not the crunch.

The vast majority of serious family conflicts began as smaller, manageable issues that weren't addressed early enough. Building the skill and the culture to raise small concerns before they become large ones is one of the highest-value things a board or family can do.

3. For boards, governance policies help, but they can't do it alone.

Clear policies, defined decision-making processes, and board norms are essential. Yet they won't hold if the relational and trust layer hasn't been tended to. Conversations and talking through shared agreements can build trust and sets a safe container.

4. Don't wait for a crisis to bring in outside help.

The best time to engage an outside facilitator or advisor is when things are stable. Proactive investment in the health of the board is less expensive, in time, money, and relationship, than repair work after things have deteriorated.

5. Handled well, conflict is a lever for stronger impact.

Families that develop the capacity to work through hard moments function better internally. They become more effective grantmakers, more honest partners, and more resilient stewards of the communities they serve. That is the real opportunity in this work.

Additional conflict resources

[Family Giving Lifecycle: Fundamentals of Family Philanthropy](#), National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2025.

[Breaking Up: Division in Family Philanthropy](#), National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2022.

[A Family Foundation Won't Fix What Isn't Working](#), Lansberg Gersick Advisors, 2025.

[How to Talk Bridgey 2.0: Lessons and Takeaways from PACE's 2025-26 Civic Language Perceptions Project](#). Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, 2026. pacefunders.org.

[Generations of Giving: Leadership and Continuity in Family Foundations](#), National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2006.

[Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most](#), Penguin Random House, 2023.

[The Art of Fighting: The Transformative Power of Conflict](#), Riverhead Books, 2026.

Appendix

What type of conflict is your board/family engaged in?

Conflict in family philanthropy rarely appears all at once. More often, it shows up through patterns—how conversations unfold, how decisions are made, and how people feel when they leave the room. The questions below can help you take a step back and assess what kind of conflict may be present in your board or family right now. Check any statements that feel familiar.

Is your board / family in artificial harmony?

- Decisions move forward without real debate or dialogue.
- The same issues surface in informal conversations but never at board meetings.
- People have side conversations about what happened in meetings.
- Funding decisions feel predetermined.
- Members question whether their voice matters, or they defer to “the loudest voice” in the room without question.
- Conversations loop in circles before coming to a decision or resolution.
- People leave meetings feeling tired, deflated, or frustrated.
- No one says what they think for fear of hurting people’s feelings.

Is your board / family in healthy conflict?

- People express different viewpoints openly and respectfully, even when the topic feels sensitive.
- Board members ask questions and build on each other’s ideas rather than shutting conversations down.
- The group takes time to understand why people see an issue differently before moving to a decision.
- There are clear group processes around communicating, generating ideas, decision-making, and more.

- People feel comfortable naming tensions or concerns in the room rather than discussing them afterward.
- Different generations, family branches, and perspectives are actively invited into the conversation, heard, and respected.
- If a board, there is a strong board chair/CEO relationship that addresses issues and strengthens the board dynamics.
- Conversations bring forth clearer thinking, stronger decisions, and a deeper understanding of the family's shared purpose.

Is your board / family in destructive conflict?

- One or two influential members run the show.
- Meetings don't have a process, and agendas can go off the rails.
- Meetings have included personal attacks or disrespectful language.
- People engage in passive aggressive behavior—stonewalling, eye rolls, or the silent treatment.
- A board or family member disrupts meetings or consistently doesn't show up.
- There are circular arguments that never reach resolution.
- Staff members are caught in the middle of board tensions.
- Family dynamics harm or stall the philanthropy's effectiveness and/or community/grantee partner relationships or pose reputational risks.

Interpreting Your Results

Most families will recognize themselves in more than one category, and that's normal. Conflict is not a fixed state. It shifts over time depending on leadership, governance structures, family dynamics, and the issues being discussed.

- **If many of your responses fall under artificial harmony**, your board may be avoiding difficult conversations. This can feel comfortable in the short term, but unresolved tensions often surface later in more disruptive ways.

- **If many fall under healthy conflict**, your board is likely engaging with disagreement in productive ways. This does not mean conversations are always easy, but it suggests that members feel able to speak openly and that the group has processes to work through differences.
- **If many responses fall under destructive conflict**, tensions may be interfering with the foundation's ability to function effectively. At this stage, it may be helpful to revisit governance structures, strengthen communication norms, or consider bringing in outside facilitation.

Wherever your family finds itself, the goal is to develop the skills, relationships, and structures that allow disagreement to lead to learning, stronger decisions, and deeper trust over time.

About NCFP

The National Center for Family Philanthropy is a network of philanthropic families committed to a world that is vibrant, equitable, and resilient. We share proven practices, work through common challenges, and learn together to strengthen our ability to effect meaningful change. As a trusted partner to philanthropic families, we understand the complexities and opportunities of giving together, and we equip families to effectively navigate the changing world. We support family philanthropy decision-makers by offering signature programs and events, peer-based learning opportunities, tools and resources, community, and personalized support. Learn more at www.ncfp.org.

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