More than ever before, giving families are working to involve multiple generations in their philanthropy.

According to the National Center for Family Philanthropy’s Trends in Family Philanthropy Study, nearly 3 in 5 U.S. family foundations engage younger family members in the foundation — and more than 40 percent say they expect to add to or increase the number of younger-generation family members on their boards in the near future.
We believe that the best family philanthropy happens when every generation has a seat at the table.

This issue brief was written with this emergent trend in mind and to help families understand how to best involve multiple generations in their work.

In it, you’ll find information about:

- why you should involve the entire family in your giving,
- strategies for incorporating younger generations into your foundation’s work,
- common challenges and expert approaches,
- tips for on boarding new generations into your foundation, and
- suggestions for next generation family members who are getting involved in their families’ philanthropy.

As the title of this paper suggests, this passages paper is the second edition of “Opportunity of a Lifetime.” The original paper, “Opportunity of a Lifetime: Young Adults in Family Philanthropy,” written by Alison Goldberg (herself a Gen X family philanthropist) was published in 2002. A lot has changed in 15 years, so we decided to take another look at the best practices, technology, benefits, challenges, and opportunities for next generation engagement. This paper builds on and updates the work of the original to offer new voices and insights.

Fifteen years after the publication of the original paper, we are happy to report that there’s been a significant increase in scholarship around next generation and youth philanthropy. You can find a brief bibliography of some of the most notable works at the end of this paper. With so much great work being done on this niche (but growing) subsection of the field, we wanted to shine a light on this work, without replicating it. You’ll want to be sure to follow the hyperlinks to resources, activities, and case studies!

Throughout this paper, we hope to shift the focus of the conversation of next generation engagement from a “passing the baton” mentality — where succession planning is the motivator for next gen participation — to an intergenerational focus. We believe that the best family philanthropy happens when every generation has a seat at the table. This Passages paper provides family, staff, and next generation perspectives on how to make the most of your all family’s time, talent, treasure, and ties.
Why Involve the Whole Family?

Initiating an intergenerational philanthropic practice takes a lot of preparation and patience, but the investment is well worth the return. There are a wide variety of benefits to bringing generations together, including:

**The family develops deeper ties through giving and philanthropy.** Tracy Family Foundation youth committee member Mike Tracy explains, “I view our family’s foundation as the key place for connecting all of us together as we all move through life. My foundation has 47 family members in the third generation. We are a big group, and we are all getting older; the foundation continues to provide an opportunity to keep us all together. When I’m participating on a conference call or traveling to a meeting for the foundation, I’m often doing it with my aunts, uncles, and cousins. And while I maybe haven’t seen them recently in person, it’s a great opportunity for us to connect.”

**When we invite the next generation to the table, everyone has an opportunity to learn, personally and professionally.** Young people often report that they gain valuable life and professional skills through philanthropic participation. These skills and experiences can open doors to career growth opportunities and prepare them for the challenges of daily adult life (like budgeting!). Andrus Family Fund board member Isabel Griffith shares, “My youth philanthropy experiences helped solidify my passions and helped me to envision where my path goes from here.”

No matter what age or stage of life you’re in, the changing world of the philanthropic sector leaves so much to learn and discover.

**The family learns more about the critical issues that impact their local and global communities.** As social justice and issue-based philanthropy are on the rise, young people are increasingly observant of, and responsive to, issues locally, nationally, and globally. Even if your family’s philanthropy has a place-based mission, tech-savvy millennials can help connect this work with global issues. By pairing this knowledge with the practical wisdom and enduring relationships built by older generations, families are well positioned to impact today’s most pressing issues.

**We learn to work more effectively with individuals of different ages, beliefs, and experiences.** Family philanthropy is a great occasion for fostering meaningful relationships across generational lines, both within the family and out in the community. When we incorporate family members from diverse walks of life, we not only gain a variety of perspectives, but we also gain the chance to practice cross-generational communication and teamwork skills.
We gain new and innovative ideas to explore and incorporate in our foundation or fund’s work. Generational differences can render some of the most interesting tensions in group dynamics. When we address these tensions and explore our differences, giving families can develop strategies and solutions that honor the complexity of community and change. Bringing new eyes and minds to the work can also bring about a mental shift from doing good to doing better.

Young people bring us up to speed on new technology, media, and communication. We can keep our philanthropic work connected to our partners, stakeholders, and beneficiaries by understanding and utilizing the different methods and media of contemporary communication. New media presents more opportunities to influence and significantly impact causes and movements, near and far. And by leveraging the power of data analysis, we have more sophisticated and accurate ways to evaluate our progress.

The next generation becomes advocates for philanthropy and generosity. Engaging in family philanthropy can help the next generation to learn the importance of generosity and philanthropy at an early age. Participation also helps young people learn to articulate their charitable values and become vocal advocates in their broader communities.

**ON-BOARDING TIPS**

- **Review the nuts and bolts.** Hold a workshop to review the foundation’s mission, history, bylaws, and investments. Provide a board booklet with reference materials.

- **Visit a range of programs to learn about issues.** Bring young adults to meetings and site visits to organizations that range in scale and approach. Don’t be afraid to try out a virtual site visit as well! Debrief afterwards.

- **Teach about philanthropy.** Invite philanthropic educators to share information about the history of American philanthropy, philanthropy in different cultures around the world, and giving philosophies (i.e. identity-based, social justice, strategic, and venture philanthropy).

- **Talk about legacy.** Invite speakers who can talk about the donor’s life and the foundation’s history. Discuss the history of the foundation’s money (how the wealth was generated) and what that means for its legacy.

- **Introduce young adults to peers.** Visit other family foundations, go to conferences and introduce young people to other young trustees and professional staff.

- **Define board roles.** Educate your trustees about being a trustee (or other positions they may hold) and the scope of their responsibilities and decision-making authority.

- **Provide technical information.** Teach young adults how to read financial statements, legal documents, and about the other technical information they will encounter. Similarly, seasoned board members can benefit in numerous ways from the high levels of technological literacy and adaptability of Millennials and Gen Z’ers.

- **Help the family to explore and articulate their individual philanthropic interests.** Invite everyone to write personal philanthropic mission statements to explore and articulate their values, experiences, and giving goals, and share your own. Generate lists of activities the family is interested in becoming involved in during the coming year. Ask them to prioritize and work with them to take next steps.

- **Encourage mentoring.** Strong relationships within and outside the family provide channels for developing expert skills and deep ties to the family legacy.

- **Provide opportunities to learn.** Invite young adults to attend philanthropy conferences, regional gatherings, nonprofit events, and other educational forums. Offer subscriptions to philanthropy and issue-based journals. Share and discuss resource materials and books.

- **Create opportunities to develop foundation materials or programs.** Identify materials or programs the foundation needs and invite young people to put them together.
Models of Intergenerational Engagement

There are many different ways to engage your family members in philanthropy, regardless of their age. Here are seven popular ways that families in the NCFP network have done it:

**Junior (or “Next Gen”) Board:** Some foundations engage younger generations by creating a next generation grantmaking board that operates separately from the foundation board. A junior board typically receives a discretionary allocation that its members are responsible for allocating. These decisions must be approved by the foundation board. Junior boards are sometimes supervised by an adult family member or foundation staffer, sometimes they are self-governed. We often see this model replicated for emeritus board members. Consider allowing friends, long-time grantees and other foundation supporters to participate on these boards (barring conflicts of interest, of course).

*Example: Tarsadia Family Foundation*

**Voting Board Member:** A voting board member has a seat on the foundation board and is allowed to contribute to voting decisions regarding grantmaking and additional philanthropic business. Some foundations only allow next generation voting board members to participate in certain committees.

*Example: Tracy Family Foundation*

### 20 CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL FAMILY FOUNDATIONS (from the desk of Ginny Esposito)

NCFP President Ginny Esposito has more than 20 years of experience counseling families on navigating difficult (and joyful!) foundation transitions. Here are 20 characteristics of successful foundations that all family boards can aspire to:

1. They take responsibility for ensuring the foundation has the best board possible and regularly ask, “What is in the best interest of the foundation?”
2. They think about good governance overall, and not just how it will apply to the next generation.
3. They articulate expectations for performance and ensure they are met (no excuses).
4. They think of the board as a whole.
5. They address the question of perpetuity and the impact on governance.
6. The senior members remember what it was like to be kept waiting (and waiting and waiting).
7. They articulate shared eligibility requirements and a good nomination process.
8. They develop a system of terms and rotation.
9. They deal creatively but purposefully with geography.
10. They have been communicating and cultivating a sense of the family’s charitable ethics and stewardship responsibilities long before the next generation was ready to serve on the board.

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11. They make clear distinctions between personal giving priorities and shared priorities and how each will be handled

12. They have a strong, capable board chair willing to deal effectively with conflict or difficult dynamics

13. They embrace opportunities for reflection and ongoing learning

14. They have the willingness and a system to assess board performance

15. They have considered (and usually taken on) non-family board members

16. They provide a multi-generational experience (no baton passing)

17. They provide an orientation for new members – covering not only grantmaking but topics like financial literacy, community expectations, etc.

18. They reject ownership/prerogative in favor of a sense of stewardship

19. They move past the “controlling donor/trustee” patterns of elder generations and embrace shared governance with respect, candor, and integrity

20. The board believes that the family serves the foundation (not the reverse)

**Observing Board Member:** An observing board member is a person who has a seat on the board of directors, observing and contributing to foundation business and/or grantmaking discussions, without having an official vote. Often, this is an important step for next generation family members toward full voting participation.

**Matching Grant Program:** Some families create matching grantmaking program or policy that allows them to amplify funds raised or contributed by family members. Some families also offer to match volunteer time with a monetary contribution. This can be done on an individual or group basis.

*Example: Andrus Family Fund*

**Discretionary Grant Program:** Many families utilize discretionary grantmaking programs that allocate a certain amount of money to each eligible family member for individual grantmaking. Sometimes, the next generation participants pool their money to make a collective decision, not unlike the junior board model.

*Read More: Discretionary Grants: Engaging Family... or Pandora’s Box?*

**Family Foundation Internship:** Next generation family members are sometimes invited to participate in part- or full-time occupational training programs in which they work alongside family members or foundation staff and learn more about the family’s philanthropy.

*Example: Hilton Family Foundation and Nord Family Foundation*

**Giving Circle:** A giving circle is a program that invites participants to contribute or raise funds to pool and collectively allocate. This model is often issue-based and sometimes is supported through a discretionary or matching grant program. Giving circles often have an educational component to help participants learn about their grantmaking topic.

*Example: Dekko Foundation*

Tip: Keep in mind that these same tools can also be used for emeritus board members, for family members that no longer live within the grantmaking geography, or to give family branches some grantmaking sovereignty.
Young family members may feel isolated by wealth

It’s no secret that family wealth can be a sticky subject. Young people in particular may feel uncomfortable with their family’s wealth, especially if they weren’t wealth generators themselves. They might be skeptical of engaging in their family’s philanthropy because they worry about how their peers might perceive it. Acknowledging our privileged positions as individuals who have the resources to impact our communities can often be in conflict with our ideas about how to instill humility and gratitude in our children.

Lisa Parker, a consultant to family philanthropists, and president of the Lawrence Welk Family Foundation (LWFF), shares a few helpful tips as to how she approaches this delicate subject: “Ask more questions and listen to family members explore what it is about the wealth that is discomforting. They may feel burdened or angry about the duty attached with wealth. The saying ‘to whom much is given much is expected’ is a very intimidating, all encompassing, vague imperative. Once you discern what about the wealth is troubling, then you can start a conversation around how wealth can be a tool for a life well lived, for bringing out the best self, and developing passions and exposure to the world.”

Conflicting views and interests arise in the family’s grantmaking process

Conflict and disagreement are about as essential to family as embarrassing baby photos. These conflicts can be exacerbated by generational dynamics. The good news is that it’s completely natural for young people to hold differing opinions from their older family members. It makes sense that the giving goals and grantmaking processes of the family foundation may appeal more to the values of the older generations, since they likely had a hand in shaping those priorities.
The Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation (FCFFF) works through this challenge by meeting its young people where they are at in their giving goals. The foundation brings family members on site visits beginning at a young age and allows them to pursue interests that arise in school and with their peers. Youth Philanthropy Connect (YPC) Program Director Katherine Scott shares, “Sometimes young people identify a preference to be more involved in a nonprofit than in their family’s philanthropic work. Still, there are ways to support them in their philanthropic journey that allows them to have engagement that they really care about, even if it’s a little non-traditional.” Matching or other discretionary grants can be an effective way to leverage the foundation’s resources to empower divergent interests.

Two units in Generations Together offer exercises to help families define their philanthropic identities and shared values. M1:U4 “Values” and M3:U2 “Developing your Philanthropic Identity”

Young people are typically busy at various stages in their lives

Many young people in philanthropy struggle to coordinate their philanthropic work with their hectic schedules as they move through different stages of their personal and professional lives. However, this challenge can also provide a benefit as these young people gain a unique perspective by navigating life changes.

While the challenge of working around the schedules of very busy young people can seem daunting, there are many tricks for making it more manageable. Making board meetings accessible for young people by avoiding times and locations that are inaccessible for them is a great first step. Utilizing technology such as video conferencing, virtual site visits, and online grant evaluations also helps facilitate participation for next gen members.

For Jenny Kelly, executive director of the Roy A. Hunt Foundation (RAHF) flexibility is crucial to navigating how to bring people at many different stages of live together. For her family, it is important that there is room to be flexible with meeting times. She shares, “We have to be willing to hold some meetings in the evenings or over the weekend to work around people’s busy schedules.” Approaching this challenge with an open mind to unconventional compromises is key!

There is often a disparity in philanthropic knowledge across generational lines

Philanthropy can be confusing to those new to its inner workings. Specific jargon and idiosyncratic technical processes can be hard to pick up on. But regardless of whether a trustee is a seasoned professional or a newbie, all trustees should be encouraged to view continuing education as an integral piece of their service to the family philanthropy. NCFP offers the Trustee Education Program tools for navigating these challenges.

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Institute biennially, which is a great opportunity to learn about trusteeship. (See a recent agenda here.) Young people and early career professionals may look to a professional philanthropy network to help them establish relationships and learn about the field. Some such networking groups are: Young Nonprofits Professional Network, Youth Philanthropy Connect, or Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy.

Upon joining the philanthropy program, family members may experience foundation culture shock

Families don’t always communicate about their wealth and giving programs very openly. This issue often arises in the parent-child relationship. Being new to the program and/or new to organized giving can make that initial introduction quite stressful. Preparation is key to overcoming this challenge. Many families find success in providing an orientation, where family members discuss the family history as well as the founding legacy and vision. Providing a set of materials to help guide the family foundation experience such as a glossary of philanthropy jargon, instructions for grant review, and family history documents can give folks something to return to time and again.

Lila Hunt, RAHF board member, found that a training opportunity, along with the family’s support, greatly impacted her experience as a family foundation member: “Two of my cousins were joining the foundation in the same year as I was, so our office offered a training program for the three of us. It was a three-day weekend spent learning about how the foundation works. We went on site visits as a group and learned how to read grant proposals. It’s kind of overwhelming when you first step in to the role, but the training was a great learning opportunity. Now for some of the newer trustees, we act as mentors and we take them on site visits and explain the process of each meeting we go through.”

Different generations prefer different means of communication

The difference in communication style from Generation X to Millennials can be pretty vast at times (not to mention from Baby Boomers to Gen Z). Everyone has varying comfort levels when utilizing technology, so it’s important to remember to have patience and adequate training. Continue to explore new ways to use email, drop box, google drive, social media, doodle polls, FaceTime, skype and other interactive tools to engage young people in your family’s work. Some of the more advanced technologies present great opportunities for your younger generations to share skills with the older generations!

At the end of the day, nothing beats in-person dialogue. Jenny Kelly of RAHF tries to encourage face to face meetings with the next generation members, but much of the foundation work is done through various technological platforms to accommodate busy schedules: “Most of what we do is done online, through web polls, conference calls, and video chatting. For example, a committee working on a group grant will have conference calls to discuss the grant. A lot of the work behind the scenes, for 11 ½ months out of the year, is done over some form of technology and then two weekends a year we really need them in person.” By using a combination of high- and low-tech communication tools and strategies everyone gets to learn and practice skills they’ll use for life.

Family dynamics and unspoken rules may be confusing to next generation members

Family dynamics are, for better or worse, the glue of any family. Over time, these unspoken rules and old tiffs usually sort themselves out on their own, typically by the third generation. But if you don’t want to wait, you can take the first step of encouraging open conversation and naming the previously unnamed. This will help everyone to get clear on the expectations of being a trustee or board member.

Lila (of RAHF) uses the grounding perspective of family to help understand family dynamics: “We always keep in mind that we are a family and we’re here to hear each other out and respect opinions. We’re all doing this for the common good and we’re helping amazing organizations. There’s going to be disagreements but at the end of the day we’re all still a family and that mentality has worked for many years!”

Module 3 Unit 3 of Generations Together “Peers and Networks” provides a great starting point for peer-to-peer learning with opportunities to convene as well as reports to read.

Module 5 Unit 4 of Generations Together “Family Dynamics” is dedicated to helping folks of every age navigate this ageless challenge. Check out this short article about healthy tools for conflict resolution.
Suggestions for the Next Gen

• Understanding your family legacy and donor intent is so important! Discuss the mission, legacy, and donor intent with your family members. If you’re a millennial, chances are you’re also an amateur videographer, scrap booker, memory box maker, podcaster, writer, or some other creative type. Offer your skills to help document your family’s history, especially if the founder is still active. You’ll learn so much while also preserving your family’s most important memories.

• Discuss what the expectations your family has for you as a member of the foundation and what expectations you have for them. Be honest with yourself about what you can reasonably take on and what kind of commitment you can sustain.

• Ask questions, google answers, search the NCFP Knowledge Center. There’s no such thing as a bad question, and most likely you’re not the only one asking it. Everyone benefits when someone is bold enough to ask their questions.

• If your foundation is just beginning to involve young people, be patient and be willing to evolve as a foundation.

• Try to find points of commonality: your family raised you so there’s a good chance your moral fabric is made up of the same stuff. Look for places where your interests and values overlap with those of the family mission.

• Don’t be afraid to question traditions and authority, but be patient and expect push back. Change happens at the speed of trust, so you should try to minimize unnecessary antagonism while you express your views.

• If you can, participate in site visits and attend community events. Get as close as possible to the people your family foundation can help. Empathy and awareness don’t cost a thing.

• Seek out opportunities to learn about the philanthropic sector. Connect with other local foundations, community foundations, and professional networks. Your local community foundation is a great place to start.

• Join a peer networking group of young philanthropists!

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Engaging the next generation in family philanthropy doesn’t mean what it used to. Segregated peer groups and deep disparities in access to foundation resources, otherwise known as the “grey ceiling,” will soon be a thing of the past. According to Foundation Center estimates, family foundations have grown in number by 50 percent since 2002. The internet has 3 billion more users today than in 2002. No one needs a white paper to inform us that family philanthropy and the planet are changing. We know that intergenerational giving can be fraught and frustrating, but we’re also deeply convinced it can be the opportunity of a lifetime to create profound family ties and remarkably effective family philanthropy.

Conferences and Workshops

- YPC conference and leadership team
- NCFP webinars, national forums, and workshops
- Exponent Philanthropy conferences and fellows program
- Council on Foundations conference and webinars
- 21/64 trainings and convenings
- EPIP national conference and regional events
- YNPN national conference and regional events
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations webinars and conferences

Connect with Peers

Interested in connecting with a local or regional group? To find some of the nearly 500 US-Based programs (and 900 across the world), visit youthgiving.org and search by your state.

Want to work with folks who share your personal identity? Check out the many practitioner groups around the country at Change Philanthropy.

Have family members between the ages of 8-21 and not sure how to get them started? Take a look at Youth Philanthropy Connect to find events and resources.

Want to connect with other young progressive inheritors and wealth generators? Resource Generation offers workshops, dinners, and local groups for philanthropists who are committed to progressive politics and social justice.

Interested in learning more about philanthropy in your community, or finding great community partners to support? Contact your local community foundation or regional association and see what events and services they offer.

Want to think strategically about how to use the other 95% of your assets to effect social change? Consider partnering with a local Social Venture Partners chapter to learn about philanthropic venture collaboration.

Have a cause in mind that you want to impact? Join or create an online giving circle at the Giving Circles Fund.

Youthgiving.org
Literature Review


The 2015 Millennial Impact Report studies the relationships and experiences between millennial employees and their managers. How do managers influence participation in company cause work? What else inspires participation? The purpose of this study was to test these hypotheses and help companies and organizations understand the relationships that drive participation in the workplace; build corporate cultures that fully leverage cause work and corporate responsibility; recruit talented, passionate employees; and drive employee happiness at work. This year’s research develops greater insight into the preferences of Millennials and managers when it comes to volunteering, donating and participating in cause work through their company.

Scanning the Landscape of Youth Philanthropy: Observations and Recommendations for Strengthening a Growing Field (2014)

This report shares reflections on an in-depth examination of the story and needs of youth grantmaking (young people making monetary contributions to organizations through established institutions or governing bodies). The report finds that while more than 200 foundations worldwide offer youth grantmaking programs and more than 100 related resources exist, that information is not broadly available. Recommendations include providing wider access to youth philanthropy programs, centralizing resources, and increasing in-person gatherings. This scan was conducted in partnership with Youth Philanthropy Connect, a program of the Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation.

Next Gen Donors: Shaping the Future of Philanthropy (2013)

In this study, GrantCraft joined 21/64 and the Johnson Center for Philanthropy in listening to and reflecting upon the voices of a selected group of major donors in their 20s and 30s. In their interviews, study participants expressed a desire to be hands-on philanthropists — with their grant recipients, their approach to issues, their families, their peers, and other funders. Generation X and Millennial interviewees described generational differences in the ways they learn about new ideas, approaches, and people. This group of next generation donors highlighted their deep interest in helping and applying their skills sooner rather than later. These starter questions can be used to promote dialogue for audiences including next generation donors; family, community, and private foundations; donor advised funds; philanthropy networks; advisors; and researchers.


This book examines various strategies for engaging Millennials as constituents, volunteers, and donors, and focuses on how organizations can realign themselves to better respond to Millennials. The crux of Cause for Change is the Millennial Engagement Platform, an action based rubric included in each chapter to help your organization create the infrastructure for a long-term millennial engagement strategy.


This book explores how privilege works in our society, and how young people can use it to better society. Based on the authors’ experiences with Resource Generation, a national nonprofit working with wealthy young progressives, the book makes the case for addressing urgent social and economic needs financially. It frames controversial topics from power dynamics to grants payout in an accessible way, offering next-generation readers the tools they need to transform their funds. Drawing on over 40 interviews, this is an essential guide for both young philanthropists and anyone working with wealthy families interested in ethical giving.

Splendid Legacy 2: Creating and Recreating your Family Foundation (2017)

Splendid Legacy 2 is filled with advice and resources from the field’s foremost experts in family philanthropy. It serves as a guide through creating your family foundation, developing your framework and processes, and revitalizing and reenergizing along the way. This volume is a must-own guide for any family at point in their philanthropic process. Among many, the chief contribution of this collection is the attention paid to role and value of family in philanthropy through case studies, anecdotes, and first-person narratives.
About the Authors

Kylie Musolf is a program associate at the National Center for Family Philanthropy and has been active in youth philanthropy and grantmaking for more than a decade. She holds a B.A. in Philosophy from American University.

Danielle LaJoie is a senior at the University of Michigan and will graduate in 2018 with a B.A. in Political Science. She currently serves on the Council of Michigan Foundations board of trustees and as their 2017 Mawby intern. In the past, Danielle has worked as a family foundations intern at CMF, a fellow at Youth Philanthropy Connect (YPC), and interned at NCFP and at the Battle Creek Community Foundation. As a youth philanthropist, Danielle was a member of the Battle Creek Community Foundation YAC, Co-Chair of the Michigan Community Foundations Youth Project (MCFYP) Committee, YPC Leadership Team member, and a Foundation Center youthgiving.org Advisory Committee member.

About the National Center for Family Philanthropy

The National Center for Family Philanthropy (NCFP) is the only national nonprofit dedicated exclusively to families who give and those who work with them. We provide the resources, expertise and support families need to transform their values into effective giving that makes a lasting impact on the communities they serve. Together, we make great things happen.

Support NCFP and the Passages Issue Brief Series

We offer special thanks to our Leadership Circle members and to Friends of the Family, our annual contributors who make it possible for NCFP to produce important content for the field. We also express our deep gratitude to the family foundations that agreed to share their stories in this paper. For information about becoming a Friend of the Family, email ncfp@ncfp.org or call 202.293.3424.

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