

Family Foundation Board Decision-Making Matrix

National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2024

Decision	Family Control	Decision-making Method
	<i>Hold / Share / Delegate</i>	<i>Unilateral Unilateral with Input Delegation Board Vote Consensus</i>
<i>Foundation Purpose</i>		
Donor intent and legacy considerations		
Purpose of the Foundation		
Values		
Vision and mission		
<i>Philanthropic Priorities, Strategy, and Grantmaking</i>		
Geographic focus		
Grant guidelines, including size, duration, cycle, and due diligence		
Grants approval		
Impact goals and objectives		
Issue or program areas		
Strategy approval		
<i>Board Eligibility, Selection, Election, and Preparation</i>		
Advisory Boards or Councils		
Board and officer nomination, election, and terms		
Board compensation and reimbursement		
Board composition and size		
Board Member qualifications and job description		
Bylaw review/changes		
Code of Conduct and/or ethics		
Committee structure and terms		
Conflict of interest policy		
Decision-making processes		
Evaluation of Board performance		
Family engagement policy		
Officer job description		
Succession planning		

Communications and Transparency		
Communications policy		
Core Foundation brand and identity elements		
Investments, Spending Policy, and Lifespan		
Asset allocation		
Due diligence and monitoring		
Impact Investing and Social Impact strategies		
Investment Manager		
Investment Policy Statement		
Lifespan		
Risk management		
Spending policy		
Tax efficiency/implications		
Management and Staffing		
Annual operating plan and budget		
Audit		
CEO oversight and compensation		
CEO succession plan		
Financial management		
Legal and compliance		
Assessment and Learning		
Impact performance measurement		
Learning agenda for Board		

NOTE: For a word copy of this document to adapt/ fill in for yourself, please contact the National Center for Family Philanthropy at ncfp@ncfp.org.

Additional Resources on Board Decision-Making:

- [The Family Giving Lifecycle Toolkit](#)
- [Demystifying Decision Making in Family Philanthropy](#)
- [Building the Board Your Foundation Deserves: The Governance Checklist](#)

Appendix: Family Foundation Board Decision-Making Methods

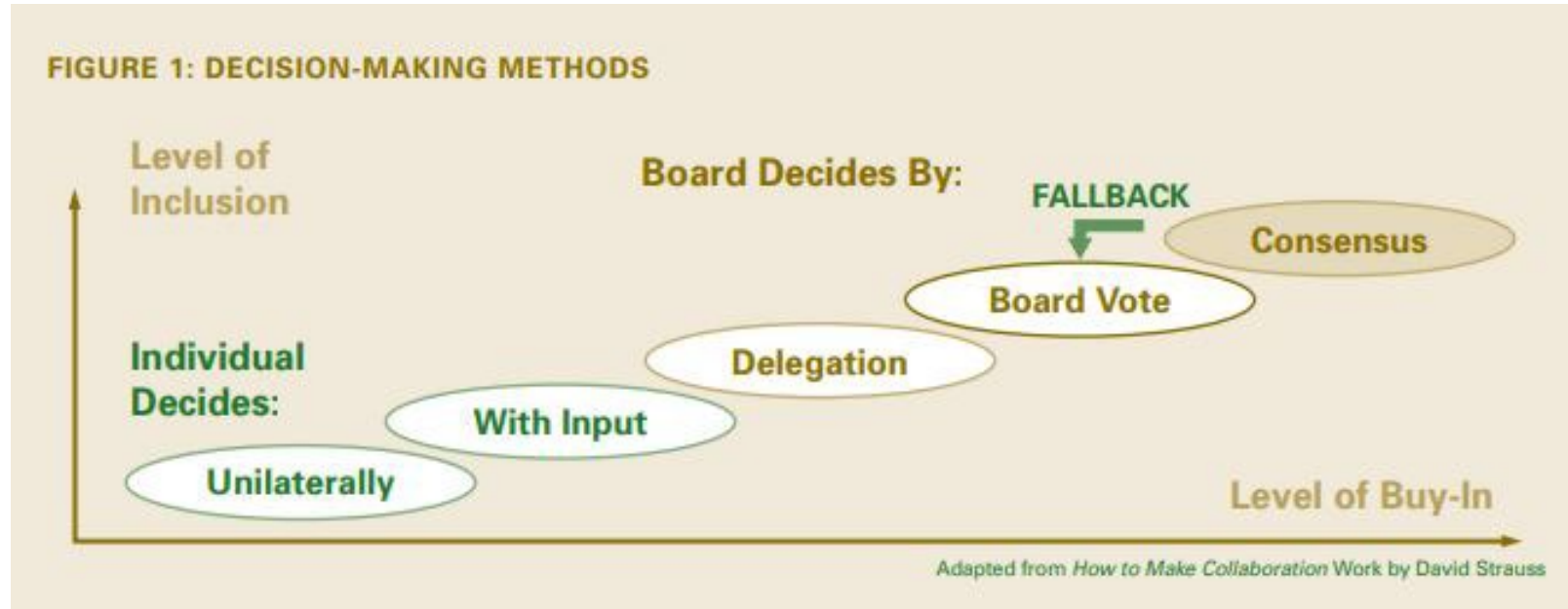


Figure 1 illustrates different decision-making methods for families. It is not intended to represent the full universe of decision-making options, but rather to illustrate methods most commonly used by foundation boards. The two axes show the level of ownership: The greater the level of involvement in the decision, the more people feel included in the decision-making process, and the more buy-in they are likely to have.

[Source: [Demystifying Decisionmaking in Family Philanthropy](#) by Ann Shulman]

1. **Unilateral Decision Making:** With this method, an individual makes a unilateral decision and announces it to the group.
2. **Unilateral Decision Making with Input:** In this case, all participants come together to share their perspectives on an issue but ultimately, select persons retain decision making authority.
3. **Delegation:** This method transfers decision making authority to a sub-group of the participants—usually those with a specific expertise.
4. **Board Votes:** In this widely used governance model, participants vote on decisions and the majority rules. All participants retain an equal vote.
5. **Consensus:** In this method, decisions are advanced under a consensus framework—all participants support the decision.