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**The National Center for Family Philanthropy
Teleconference Series Presents:**

Creative Agendas for More Effective Family Meetings

August 12, 2010

Susan Price: Hello everyone and welcome to the National Center for Family Philanthropy's teleconference seminar on Creative Agendas for More Effective Family Meetings. My name is Susan Price and I'm a Vice President here.

This call is the latest in our series of monthly conversations with experts and practitioners on various trends and topics in family philanthropy. As always, we want to extend a very special welcome to the community members from our Friends of the Family Program and also our Family Philanthropy online Knowledge Partners. From these communities we have several discussion groups that are going to be joining us for today's call.

Now before I turn to today's program and speakers I just want to quickly go over the agenda... [Logistics]... Okay, so thanks for bearing with me through these logistics and now let me introduce our topics and speakers.

Board meetings, of course, are a critical component of any foundation or fund's work. And we know that they can be productive and effective and sometimes even fun or alternatively they can be tedious and time wasting and difficult. So the success really depends on how well the meeting is planned. And our speakers today are very well versed in the ways to do that.

So let me first introduce Karie Brown. She's a principal of KB Consulting, and she's also on the board of her family's foundation which is the Hidden Leaf Foundation. So she'll speak from her own family's experience as well as her consulting experience. In her practice she partners with individual donors, foundations, and nonprofit groups to promote effective philanthropy and social change. Prior to starting her consulting practice seven years ago, Karie served as the Director of Programs for the Tides Foundation, a progressive donor-advised grant making institution based in San Francisco. In this position, she provided strategy design and program services to Tides clients, covering such issues as environment economic justice and women's rights. Karie has a Master's Degree in Regional Planning from MIT and she has an undergraduate degree in economics from Stanford.

Joining her is Marla Bobowick, who's President of Bobowick Consulting. Marla has extensive experience with board governance for nonprofit boards of all sizes and she has served on a few boards as well. Previously Marla was a Vice President of products at BoardSource where she oversaw publications, online products, and research. During her tenure at BoardSource she was an active consultant and trainer, developed educational curriculum, and managed a number of their other programs. She remains a senior governance consultant for BoardSource. Marla also has been an Acquisitions Editor at John Wiley & Sons. And she holds a bachelor degree in English from Amherst and a Masters in business administration from the Weatherhead School of Management plus she has a certificate in nonprofit management from the Mandel Center for nonprofit organizations. The latter of two are both Case Western Reserve University.

So we have Marla in Washington on the East Coast, Karie on the West Coast in the San Francisco area, and I'm so happy to welcome both of you. Karie, we're going to let you start.

Karie Brown: Thank you so much, Susan. And I want to just thank everybody who's on the call for giving this time and attention to this topic. A lot of people think that running meetings should be something that's just easy and natural and doesn't take so much attention. But in fact, for family foundations and funds, meetings are really one of the most critical tools to engaging your board and getting your work done and governing your institution effectively. So it's just so critical to think about and organize your meetings effectively. So thanks for giving us the time today.

I thought I would ground us in a few examples of what it's like when you're in a good constructive positive meeting environment and when it doesn't quite work that way, just so we all can feel the importance of setting an agenda, following an agenda and then carrying out an agenda effectively.

So when I think of a good meeting I call it walking on the light side. It's when you asked for volunteers in a board meeting and several people step forward to go on a site visit or to participate in a mission or a strategy meeting. It's when board members are participating, constructively offering useful suggestions, not stepping on each other's toes, being respectable. It's when you leave a meeting knowing that you've really accomplished something, you've move the agenda forward, and you've done what you said you're going to do. Staff board members and even speakers that come in can feel that this is a kind of positive constructive experience.

On the darker side one, of my worst moments -- as I often facilitate these family board meetings -- is when you ask for that same question, "could somebody volunteer for this task force?", and you're met with dead silence and nobody's moving. That's a sign that things aren't going so well. Another

classic example is one board member, oftentimes it can be someone from a senior generation, dominates the meeting, keeps staying on the same kind of hot button topic and you just can't move him or her off of that. You know what it's like when people leave there feeling dejected. They might feel frustrated. You can just feel the low energy.

So our goal today is to share some tips and tools with you so we can move from that kind of heavier, darker, not very effective side to the lighter side. I just wanted to say up front that some of these tips and tools will feel really relevant and resonate with you and other tips and tools might not. The ones that don't pertain to you or don't seem interesting or appropriate – just let those go.

One of my colleagues who works in this business as well with a lot of family foundations and funds says, “If you've seen one family foundation you've seen one family foundation.” So the idea is each institution is really unique and so take care what fits with you and just let go of those other topics.

Before we jump in I want to just give you a heads up for how we're going to be sharing the facilitation on this, Marla and I.

I'm going to primarily provide anecdotes, stories, and examples from my family foundation, the Hidden Leaf Foundation, which Susan mentioned, as well as from my intensive work with family foundations and funds as a consultant and sometimes as a board member as well. Marla's primarily going to lead us through the nuts and bolts of the information you have on the slides and what we're presenting. But we'll switch it up a little bit just to keep it interesting.

So again welcome. Thanks for participating, and I'll turn it over to Marla.

Marla Bobowick: Good morning or afternoon everyone. This is Marla speaking. And it's great to have you all here on at least a warm hot day here in Washington.

I wanted to start by creating a vision. One of the things I've heard from my family foundation clients is often that it feels like it's gathering the family around the dining room table. Sometimes that has really wonderful connotations and a good feeling about it and sometimes it's a little bit more complicated. So I've got a metaphor when we're going throughout the slides: how do we set that table appropriately for a family foundation to do its family foundation business?

So I wanted to start with on Slide 2 with some things to keep in mind about setting that table, what are the prerequisites or the preconceived things and foundational pieces, pun intended, which you need to have more creative meetings.

One of the first rules of thumb is that meetings should not be the only time the board does its work. You know, board work continues throughout the year, things happen between meetings, people are reviewing grants, people are going on-site visits. You might be doing some work on financial things or investments. So there are a lot of things that happens between meetings. You need to remember that it's only one component of your commitment and responsibilities as a board member.

At the same time, it is incredibly precious time because you're all together face to face -- not always, sometimes people might call in -- but to realize that you want to make the most of your time together. One of the ways to do that is to start and make sure that that time together is planned in advance. So make sure you have an annual calendar of meetings. Don't wait till one meeting to schedule the next one. A lot of those time-consuming calendar activities take away from the substance of the meeting and can be done just as efficiently off-line, if you will.

Think really carefully about where the meeting is and the time and the place. You know, for example, don't try and have a meeting after a big heavy dinner or cocktail hour when everyone's tired or a little tipsy. You might want to have the meeting first and then celebrate afterwards because you have to treat the family foundation or fund work as important business. It's a business of a foundation. It should be fun and exciting but it does require careful attention.

Also, oftentimes family foundations and funds bring together the family for business meetings as well. Make sure you really separate out the foundation business from any other family business or meetings and ideally put the foundation business first. Of course that's our preference.

It helps to use agreed-upon protocol for how to come together in terms of what the expectations are. So again, these are your table manners at the foundation board meeting. It should really tap into your own values. So think about how you connect your values and your vision and mission to how you interact as a foundation board.

Karie, do you want to add anything else here?

Karie Brown: No. I think I would just give my one example about what you just brought up in terms of table manners.

Table manners from a foundation perspective are something I call either ground rules or meeting protocols. I think that Susan sent you in advance a list of sample ground rules. I've gathered these from a number of, probably seven, different family foundations I've worked with, and tried to lift up the ones that I think might be relevant to a foundation. So if you have questions later about

those specific ground rules, I'd be happy to touch upon them. But I wanted to give an example of how they might work.

In my experience, in most foundations, the ground rules are not made explicit unless someone decides to really look those up and clarify them. I've found that it can really, really make a difference when that happens. It's like in a family if you don't be really clear about what your expectations are of everybody around the table then not everybody can live up to those. It's also like a family in that you often have to remind folks of what those ground rules are. But anyway, in my experience, they can make a real difference when you all work together around the table to clarify and identify what your ground rules are. Then, as you go through a meeting and people start to veer off into tangents or bringing up issues that are not on the agenda you can use the ground rules to help you get back on track.

So I was called into work with a family foundation that's been together for many, many years. It has three generations of board members. I was told by the executive director that there was a lot of tension. I met with the chair before as well, and they both said it was very difficult for the chair and executive director to get through the meetings. They could just could not stay on agenda -- like whenever there was an opportunity to bring up a certain issue that had been plaguing the organization, people would just return to that and didn't follow the agenda. There were generational issues as well, where a certain older person felt that he had earned the right to speak when and as often as he liked and about whatever topic he liked.

At any rate, halfway through this daylong meeting I could see that the dynamics were really entrenched. So I stopped the meeting and I asked everybody to come together and we jointly set up ground rules. It was hard and people were resistant but everybody did participate. We came up with what might seem like very, very simple ground rules but we then used them for the rest of the meeting. And I know that they're still using the ground rules now. I've actually gotten a couple of calls from the board members saying what a difference it makes.

So, for example they agreed that when one person is speaking no one else can speak, as a simple example. But, if that happens, then instead of the chair or another family member feeling guilty about cutting somebody off, they just remind them or point them to the ground rules.

Another key ground rule that they put in place had to do with technology. There were a couple of the new generations who were on their iPhones or whatever way too often. So it was asked that people didn't use their technology, and they set up regular breaks so that people could check in if they needed to check in with their business or other family matters.

So those are just a couple of examples to show that I've found it can really make a difference, having those ground rules developed by the board members and then adhered to by the board members. It takes a lot of pressure off the facilitator or the chair because you can just go back to the ground rules first, and it de-personalizes issues that can become very personal on a family board.

So, okay, I think I should turn that back over to you, Marla, for moving on to planning the menu.

Marla Bobowick: Thank you, Karie. So now that we have our basics out of the way and we've got the preliminaries done, we want to think about what should be on the menu. There's two parts of this. One is designing the agenda and the process for doing it, and the second part is the content. So, on Slide 3 we're going to talk about the designing, the process of getting to the agenda.

Step one is to realize that this burden should not be solely the board chair's or the executive directors. It's perfectly acceptable and encouraged to actually ask other trustees what they want to talk about, what needs to be on the agenda. There may be some issues that have been lingering or there may be some other ideas about how to approach things or different things that people want to explore or maybe people or trustees want to learn something new about a particular program area or about what's new in grantmaking. This is a chance to say, "Hey, it's your agenda. It's not me, the board chair, or executive director saying what we have to do." So there's a way to get a blend. It can just be a simple email a month in advance of the meeting – "anything on your mind that we need to talk about as a foundation?"

The second part is: when you put anything on the agenda, think about what the purpose of that discussion is. Is it about sharing information in terms of progress that's been made since the last board meeting? Is it educational for trustees to know what's the latest and IRS regulations or do decisions need to be made? Do you need to approve a grant docket? Is it time to sign the conflict of interest policy? Do we need to hire a new investment manager - whatever? So be really clear about what's informational in terms of progress and status updates, what's educational in terms of helping trustees to do their job better, and what requires action and decisions.

Of course, the next thing is to say how long it takes for each of these agenda items and to realize that by setting aside time you're also implying a priority. The more important issues are going to take longer. Be really realistic about how long it's going to take for any particular discussion and to anticipate those are going to take more time or have sensitive issues. If you know something is a controversial issue, if there's a particular grantee that you know trustees have a particularly strong feeling on both sides about, anticipate what the questions are, play out scenarios between different trustees and the

board or the executive director, think what additional information you can send out in advance to help people be prepared.

Another part of designing the agenda is to figure out who's going to facilitate each discussion and to realize it doesn't always have to be the board chair.

It's hard to facilitate a meeting and provide content and leadership, so delegate that to other trustees or staff. It can be very helpful. At the same time, it also helps build future leadership for the foundation. So the committee chairs or different family members can say, "This is something of interest to me, so I've done some research and here's what I've found."

Lastly, when you're designing the agenda, realize that sometimes it's really beneficial to get outside perspective.

Every board can use an educational moment or a different perspective on things. It may be bringing in an expert from one of your program areas to talk about what's happening in the field of the environment or the arts. It could be another family foundation executive director or a trustee from another foundation that has something similar of interest to what you're doing to share.

So one of the family foundations I worked with had their annual retreat and they invited another family foundation from the same community to join them for dinner to share some other thoughts and experiences and perspective. They sent out that bridge and brought things from the outside world into the boardroom.

So those are some basics about designing the agenda and the process. Karie, do you have anything else you wanted to emphasize?

Karie Brown: Yes, I thought I might give an example from my own experience with our family foundation. Just to give a bit of background, this is a living donor situation: my father's the donor and my two sisters and I are the other board members. We've been operating for about 20 years, and really on a small scale, although we are becoming more professional and growing the grantmaking in preparation of when my father will be donating pretty much all of his assets to the foundation when he's no longer with us. So we're practicing for that time. We've taken it very seriously.

We definitely sit around the dining room table. For the first I'd say almost ten years the majority of our time was devoted to actually selecting grantees. That really felt like what our priority should be because the money is going to these folks out there, it's really tough decisions and there's such a need and so we really wanted to do it right. I would say there was even some guilt about the focus on, board governance, or how we should structure it, hiring staff -- all those kinds of questions. We tended to put on the back burner or address them

at the very end of the meeting. We did not do a log of longer term thinking or strategy development except for those kinds of questions that emerged from the grantee work itself. So we actually realized that our meetings were getting in the way of that and perpetuating this focus on selecting grants versus looking at and really being intentional about our focus and work on issues of governance or management or longer term strategic thinking. I have to say that I have seen this pattern as a pretty common one with a lot of family foundations.

So we experimented with a number of different models which I won't go into - - but we moved to a two-meetings-a-year format, and we meet for a day or longer. In our fall meeting we focus pretty much exclusively on grantmaking. In our spring meeting we do not let ourselves do grantmaking. We sometimes look at reports but the majority of those meetings are really focused on strategy development, looking at staffing issues, thinking about board governance issues. For example, in our spring meeting this last year we took up the topic of succession. A number of us have children that are in their teens, and so we felt it was important to start thinking about that, and came up with a protocol. We were able to talk about our Web site, which we've been thinking about forever but hadn't really put our heads together on what we wanted it to look like and how we wanted to carry it out. I'm happy to say that that's going to be going live later this month. We finalized finally a theory of change and logic model that we've been working on.

Again, it takes real time and attention on these kinds of issues, and they're issues that demand some board guidance and leadership. So having these meetings that are separate and distinct from the grantmaking has really helped us, I think, give due attention and focus to the issues that fall outside of grantmaking but are really essential to being an effective board and an effective organization.

So that's my personal example, and I really encourage folks to balance your agendas and really understand your own foundation or fund's patterns and then think about you can use your agendas to make sure you're giving kind of the right amount of attention and weight over the course of the meetings during the year to the various topics that are so important to each organization.

Marla Bobowick: I think what I've heard you say, Karie, is that this is an evolution. One of the things about family foundations is that over time and as you add new generations, as your assets and endowment may grow, things might need to change - and to realize that part of it is taking time out to reflect on that change, and that might also mean that the nature of our work as trustees changes and therefore how we come together and what we do as a board needs to change. You all listening should think about where is your foundation and is it ready to change? What would the next step be? Start to anticipate that, because you want to think about it before you get there, if you can.

Part of this also relates to what goes on the agenda. If we shift gears a little bit -- we're still planning the menu but now we're talking about what's the food we're going to serve.

So one of my first rules of thumb for designing any foundation board meeting agenda is to make sure that everything that's on the agenda is really board worthy. That face time is so precious you don't want to waste it on things that are not necessarily necessary to be discussed at the board level. So if you have staff there are things that they don't necessarily need to bring to your attention. If you all are working without staff and doing a lot of this yourself, again to think about what's just an update and what really warrants discussion.

One of the ways to think about that is to put your agenda items into three buckets, the first one being sort of management of the foundation : how are you managing your accounting, what is your database like and how is it working. A second bucket, a very big and important one, is your grantmaking: figure out what level of involvement and expectation and discussion do the trustees need to have around your grantmaking, programs, and priorities, and docket. The third one is governance. Don't underestimate the importance of looking at how your board operates and the governance things. This bucket's contents run the gamut from the compliance issues: conflicts of interest and audits and Form 990 PS -- all those tedious things, but also group dynamics and how long is our meeting and how are things working and what materials and information do we need?

A lot of this is about balance - so make sure that those trustees and boards that have a tendency to spend more time looking backwards at what happened last quarter, last month, or last year and not as much time looking forward, as Karie was just alluding to, have time to anticipate what's coming up. Is there going to be influx of cash or to the endowment, such that you're going to have to give away a lot more money or a lot more grants? What's happening in the community? What are the changes that are coming up? So make sure that on your agenda you also spend some time looking ahead; find that crystal ball and put it in the middle of the table.

Lastly, oftentimes at end of the meeting, everyone's in a rush to get on to the next activity, they've got to rush home or something. Make sure you leave a little bit of time for some self reflection and conversation about how it worked. It can just be a quick meeting evaluation, that is, what I call a "plus delta." Plus is what worked today, what was really helpful and a delta is what we would change for next time, because that's part of the ongoing learning process. So, at the next meeting you can anticipate and think a little bit about how to make sure you don't end up with the same problems, or if things worked really well, how you can replicate it, even if the agenda's different.

Karie Brown: In my experience, you often see that last agenda item, an evaluation or an assessment of the meeting, with usually five minutes or so dedicated to it.

But then when you actually get to that place in the meeting, oftentimes people are tired or you've slightly gone over the timing that you intended to give to the meeting, so people give that short shrift. So I wanted to really encourage you folks: in my experience, when you dedicate the time to that, it makes a huge difference.

Over the course of three years, I've facilitated the majority of board meetings for one family foundation that I work with, and we've built in a tool for learning reflection. The staff really made an effort to follow those delta signs when something needed to be changed was identified. They really worked to change it and to make sure that the board understood that the staff was listening and that the board meetings were then being adjusted accordingly. I recently had a conversation with that executive director; she said two things that were interesting.

She felt that this really helped them live up the culture that they aspire to, which is a learning culture. So they were practicing what they were looking for all the world -- how you make change happen is you have to be willing to experiment and you have to be willing to learn and change. She said it also really helped the board -- I don't know how many of you have staff that work with your fund or foundation -- but it really helped the board-staff dynamics because the board felt that they were being listened to and responded to and had an influence on the way meetings go. The staff also felt like they had a place for them to give feedback. This helped develop a stronger clearer two-way dialogue and follow-through mechanism.

I wanted to give one other example about something Marla had said earlier. When you look at what she's gone through about planning the menu, there are different ways of looking at your agenda and different ways of entering it. It really is valuable to spend some time looking at it through these different vantage points and finding that balance. One of the things that I find is really essential is being clear as the planner of the meeting and as a participant in the meeting about what you expect to get out of each agenda item.

Is this just informational? Is this a generative discussion where you're really trying to generate ideas and to enable people to brainstorm and think outside of the box? Are you at a place where you want to make a decision? I have found that being clear about this is important. I even put it on the agenda itself. I put it in parentheses after the items saying what we are doing in this session. It's a generative discussion. We want your best open-minded thinking here, and then here's where we're ready to make a decision and move on this.

My experience is that really helps board members know what's expected of them and prepare accordingly but also participate effectively. It's not helpful when you've worked on something over a long period of time and you're ready to make a decision and then somebody throws a curveball which might

be really useful in a generative discussion but might derail you right when you're ready to make a decision. So that's a tip that I've found has been very helpful with a number of foundations that I work with.

Marla Bobowick: A lot of this ties in to having to be very explicit about your intentions. So it's not just what's in somebody's head, but it's something to prepare everyone in the boardroom, everyone around the table about where things are going, because then it's easier to get there together and not arrive at all different times and places.

So let's move on to Slide 5, which should be straightforward and fairly simple, but I never like to take things for granted. This is about sending out the dinner invitation, gathering the materials together. So now that we've designed a good board meeting agenda, we need to figure out what backup materials you need to send with it, what grant reports, what financial reports, what other materials, if there's a good article that came out about grantmaking or something about one of your grantees that was in the local paper. When you put together the board book, I think it's really helpful to tie each item on the agenda to the materials in the board book, even if it's a virtual board book. So it's clear that for this conversation, see Tab 3 or File X so that people know what the background reading is.

Obviously, this needs to go out in advance and that does not mean the night before. This is one of those hard things that again, I don't like to take for granted but people need time to read and prepare. Adults learn at all different levels and styles. Some of us need a week to digest and ponder something, while other people can skim it really quickly. You want to make sure that you're making informed decisions. The only way to do that collectively is to make sure everyone's had time to read the material in advance and then that they actually do.

The last trick is to maintain a cumulative board book, putting all those vital documents about your foundation in one place and bringing it to every meeting so that you don't get into a debate about what our bylaws say. Well, if you have them in your board book or you have a special binder that covers the basics about your foundation or your fund and it's got your bylaws and it's got your history of past grants and it's got your budget, there's no question about what the bylaws or documents say. You've got them right there.

That helps prevent that "who said what and when did we say it" conversation. It means you can go back and just keep all your board meeting minutes and follow-up on action items that came up in a row.

Karie Brown: I was just going to jump in and say one more thing about that. I think it's implied in everything that Marla just said, but it's really essential that whoever is preparing these materials knows the culture of the board, knows what the participants respond to. Some boards really like getting those

additional materials and examples and articles. Some board members will feel overwhelmed by too much information. So really try to understand what kind of board you have, what really serves the board, and then make sure that your board books and your preparatory materials cater to the way that this board works effectively.

I thought I might take the next one and turn us to Slide 6. We are going to move now to actually serving the meal. So what happens around that table? How do you make this work as well as possible?

So a first suggestion is: if at all possible to try and meet in a professional setting. Sometimes you can use a business office. There might be a colleague's foundation that has a professional space if you don't have such a space yourself. If you are meeting in a home, which happens quite often, it's really important that you find a space that's separate from the activity of the household, so that you can create a space of focus and seriousness of purpose and minimize interruptions.

Another small thing: again, this may sound obvious, but I've seen this happen so many times where one person's kind of off to the side and not really participating, and then it creates this strange dynamic where nobody quite knows how to participate or what's happening with that person. So make sure that everybody can see everybody else and that you can really work effectively as a group with your setting.

Also important, related to that same thing, is to make sure that people can see whatever it is that you're presenting. So if you're using a flip chart, don't have it behind one person. Make sure it's visible and is serving you and not distracting people.

That leads to the next piece about the use of technology which is a really key question for a lot of family foundations and funds right now. How much do you use technology? How much should you follow PowerPoint? Do you want to bring in studios? Do you want to be taking notes on a computer versus handwritten notes? So I think just be cautious or intelligent about how you use technology. I would say with PowerPoint in particular that I've seen a number of foundations shifting over to using it almost exclusively. I have found it can be somewhat deadening. It could be really used effectively for certain types of discussions, but for other discussions it puts all the attention on the screen might dilute some of the interaction that can happen. So I would just say use technology and PowerPoint judiciously.

Then make sure, again, like what we said in the earlier planning slide, that you mix it up so that people aren't doing the same thing throughout the whole meeting. You want to keep them interested and engaged.

The other thing that I've found really useful -- I mentioned it in one of the examples I gave -- is to make sure that you have regular breaks.

Again, these are things that, oftentimes, when the agenda gets tight, people will skip over. But then board members will start distrusting the fact that you're going to take a break. If you do have those breaks it gives people a chance to think to stretch, which is really healthy, but it also allows people to check-in with family or with other business matters that might be pressing so that they can then, during the actual meeting, be really focused.

Anything that you want to add to that, Marla?

Marla Bobowick: Sure. I was going to pick up on the technology thing. You don't want to distract and have everyone be looking at the screen the whole time. But if you happen to meet virtually like we're doing today, naturally a PowerPoint might be a way to keep everyone focused if they're not in the same room. Really think about being strategic on the use of technology but remember that one of the most valuable things about boards is that face time. There needs to be some time where you really do come together. We also know the realities of travel and dispersed families. There are times when you need to do some business on the phone. Those are probably better as shorter meetings, with some really good agendas and documents. That's where you have to be careful that if some of you are together and some of you are far away that you're not handing things out on site or showing things that people that are on the phone can't see. All of this is about careful planning so that you can have time for good discussions and creative thinking in the boardroom, whether it's a real boardroom or on the phone.

So I thought I would take us to serving that meal as the facilitation piece. This is always difficult for a family foundation: who's running the meeting, who's really in charge, yet wanting to make sure that everyone also has a way to participate. I know that every family and every family foundation has a different style or degree of formality, so whatever we're talking about here, think about what makes sense for your family foundation or fund. These are intended as tips for the host or hostess to think about and figure out how to share some of that leadership and make sure that the conversations are productive and robust and engaging.

So the first rule again is that every item on the agenda needs a good facilitator. But it doesn't have to be the board chair for all of them. Realize that sometimes the board chair may want to participate more than lead the discussion, because it's very hard to make sure that everyone's voices are heard, that quieter people have a chance to say something, that someone's not dominating the conversation and then to participate in it. So find a way to share that facilitation. Sometimes it's an outside consultant. Sometimes it's another board member who's just good at that. Sometimes it's just delegating different agenda items to different trustees.

Second, in terms of facilitating the action, decision, discussion, clarify how decisions are made and what decision needs to be made for that agenda item. Do we need to come to closure, or are we just brainstorming, as Karie said earlier.

Also, to protect the foundation and be explicit about your assumptions, you should articulate and be clear about what's confidential. If you're sharing information that is not meant to be shared outside the foundation or fund say that explicitly and don't assume everyone knows that.

Another little tip that seems again like a no-brainer that can really help is having someone besides the chair be a timekeeper and someone else be the notetaker so that everyone can participate. It's a very neutral person when the note taker says "could you repeat what you said, I didn't understand," or someone says "it's 11 o'clock and do we want to move on or do we want to stay here?" That way, those common decisions are made explicit, not just made by default by the chair.

Because that space time is so precious, don't read or repeat what's in the reports. People are smart. They should read their materials. You can gently nudge them if they haven't come prepared, saying "well then, no we can't make this decision or have this discussion today. We'll have to do it later on the phone if you're not prepared." Hold yourself accountable and hold each other accountable. Part of that holding people accountable is that if they start to raise issues that are not on point for the subject at hand, put it in a parking lot, a flipchart or a list somewhere of "some other things we're going to need to get back to."

At the end of the meeting, come back and say, "so we talked about this question about whether we need to move our offices or do we need another office manager," so you do discuss them later but you don't get sidetracked into brainstorming about it right then and there at the expense of not making other decisions you need to make.

Two last quick tips are to make sure at the end of each discussion that the facilitator summarizes the key conclusions and identifies what's going to happen next. That obviously helps the note taker, but it helps everyone see "okay, this is what we've agreed as a board," so that when you walk out of the family foundation board meeting you're all going to speak with one voice and know where you left off.

You know, we talked already about taking time to evaluate the meetings.

So Karie, do you have any good stories from your family?

Karie Brown: There are two places I'd love to jump in, not to air all our family's dirty laundry, but one of the things that was happening in our family foundation is

that the timekeeper would say, “Okay we’re running up on time. We need to decide if we’re going to extend this or not.” We would agree that it merited more discussion and we wanted to spend more time on it, we were really close to coming to a conclusion, so we’d agree to do that. But then we didn’t adjust the rest of the agenda. So then the rest of the agenda would get really crunched and there would be some frustration about that. So one of the things that I recommend if you decide to extend a particular item-- which is often something that’s really appropriate to do-- you as a group decide where you’re going to cut back on other discussions. So it’s an explicit agreement that makes everybody feel in control and that it’s a joint decision and that that then helps really avoid frustration later in the meeting. It avoids that kind of scrambly feeling of trying to get through the rest of the agenda. So that’s one suggestion that I’d made.

And then I wanted to pick up on the parking lot recommendation. A lot of times, particularly with family foundations, there will be historical family issues, or political orientations, things that come up that everybody in the room knows what somebody’s saying without really saying it. I just want to say that using the parking lot to surface those issues and identify them and put them on the table is really important -- not let your discussion get derailed into those topics, but also not ignore them. If you use the parking lot to say “okay, we know we need to talk about this,” then it can come up later in that meeting if there’s room or remind you to really plan intentionally for how to have that discussion in a proactive thoughtful way at a later time. That will create an environment where board members trust that they’re going to be heard. Often that elephant in the room dominates and undermines the rest of what you’re talking about, so really it’s important to get it out there and then to address it in a constructive way. Using the parking lot in a meeting and then really making sure you are intentional and strategic about how you address those topics going forward can make the difference over the long run. Families are able to tackle those tough issues in a constructive way and then move beyond them. So as I said it’s just really important to name these issues and to address them in a positive way. If you can name the difficult issues you’ll be able to tame them. So just want to encourage people that way. So don’t avoid putting those items on the agenda because they’re uncomfortable, but really think carefully about how you’re going to address them.

One of the things that I find helpful is creating a safety zone for sensitive issues so you put parentheses around those topics that could be difficult for folks who have been identified as being difficult, and then create a way that ensures that it’s comfortable and a safe zone. So it might be that on a tough discussion you ask people to go around the room so that everybody has a say.

Another approach that I’ve found that works well is to have the equivalent of a personal risk flag so that people raise something whether it is -- this may sound too Californian and I’m sorry if it does -- but raising a little flag that indicates “this is hard for me to say, I know it might be difficult for other

people” so everybody knows that it might be a hot button topic and then is relates to it in a gentler, more receptive and hopefully constructive way.

Another thing you can do is: if a discussion is difficult and there’s not the time and it’s the place to go into it, you can use an index card and ask people to write down what they would have said next in this discussion; it can be anonymous if they like. You can then process that information either later in the meeting or at another time so you can take that discussion forward. People feel like they've been heard without having to go fully into it at that point or expose themselves. I hope we leave you with this message: don't avoid tough issues, but be really thoughtful and careful and supportive in how you address them.

Marla Bobowick: I would just echo that. I think that well, you know, there are always tough issues that come up, and if you ignore them they get bigger and more difficult and more detrimental to the good of the foundation. So finding a way to have those conversations is the most important thing to do. It’s going to be different for every group but ignoring them is about the worst thing you can do.

We’ve just had our dessert and we’re all done and we just want to make sure we do some of the common courtesies, what happens after the board meeting. In this day and age I know we’re all busy, but it’s really important. There’s no reason to not send board meeting minutes out immediately or shortly after the meeting, because that’s when it’s fresh in people’s mind. They can say yes that’s what I heard or no that’s not what I thought it was. When you wait three months or six months or a year till the next meeting no one really remembers or pays attention to them. It’s also a very valuable reminder because in the minutes it says what the action items are and what the decisions. So it’s a good reminder of the next steps. Lastly, those next steps are only as good as your ability to follow-up on them.

So really have a clear sense and a process and a structure or mechanism to make sure that whatever action items need to happen are followed-up on, that there’s somebody tracking it - whether you have staff or its a designated board member or the secretary or somebody says “hey, this is what we all committed to, we need to make sure it happens,” and that there’s some follow-up.

So those are the easy dos. The don'ts are just a reminder some of the things we've talked about. This is why that five minute evaluation or ten minute evaluation is so important: don't walk out of the boardroom and then stand in the parking lot or in the hallway or at the next family dinner undermining a decision that was made. You have to respect the collective action of the board. Part of that is making sure that you adhere to that. Don't publicly share internal debates. Again part of it is when you walk out of that boardroom you speak with one voice. And don't disclose confidential information, which again seems like common sense, but sometimes these reminders are important.

So I think we're getting close to time. I don't know if we should talk a little bit about the common pitfalls, Karie?

Karie Brown: I think we should move to closing this and give people a chance to ask questions.

Susan Price: That's great because I'm actually getting questions based on some of the things that you've already said. We're going to end the formal presentation of the call and I'm going to tell you about the next teleconferences. Then we're going to open this up to everyone who's interested in the open Q&A. You can email your questions. You can also ask them live... [Logistics]...

I'll start with a question while we get people warmed up. And then if you want to email a question send it to teleconferences@ncfp.org.

So two people have emailed me with the same question about the role of the staff person in the facilitating a board meeting as opposed to the board chair.

One person wrote, "how can the executive director help the board chair take responsibility for managing the board meeting -- she often defers to the executive director -- to control the meeting and move the agenda along, and it's a sensitive issue to handle?" The other questioner said, "what is the role of the board versus the staff in facilitating the agenda items?" What do you think?

Karie Brown: Marla, you want to go first?

Marla Bobowick: Sure. So, I'm thinking about the family foundations I've seen and, again as Karie said, when you've seen one family foundation you've seen one family foundation.

But this is a family foundation and in the end the board is responsible for it. The executive directors I know that support family foundations are very clear that they are very instrumental in behind the scenes helping craft the agenda, helping to get materials out, providing the numbers and the content information and what grantees are saying, because we may be more on the front lines of that side of it. But part of the role of the board chair is to facilitate. The staff may present a lot of information but the conversation and the dialogue should be between and among board members. You're supporting the chair in framing questions and leaving questions open, not necessarily having all the answers and that is perfectly acceptable. It's not that the board chair has to have the answers, either but they need to make sure the questions get asked and figure out the best way to get them answered. So it's not an easy answer: the chair doesn't have to know everything, and they can certainly turn to the staff for information, but the chair's job is to keep the board engaged. So, Karie, can you make it more practical?

Karie Brown: No, I just want to say I really agree with what you're saying. In my experience it's quite typical that the chair will defer to the staff person. I think it's much healthier to move towards something like Marla was saying where the board chair is really leading the meeting -- even if somebody else is facilitating particular discussions or agenda items-- the chair is holding the meeting and carrying it forward.

Some suggestions around are one, when there is staff, the staff should work really carefully with the chair prior to the meeting so that the chair understands a lot of the things that Marla and I have been talking about. That is, the chair understands what the purpose of each item is, they understand what you're trying to get out of the board on each item, whether you're trying to make a decision or just have a discussion about it. Also noting where the hot button issues might be and then the staff and the chair strategizing about what to do about that. If you're sure that one board member is going to pipe in and do a certain thing on a certain item, it can be really effective if the chair talks in advance with that person about the agenda item and helps prepare themselves and that other person for the meeting.

The last thing which I would suggest, which is slightly different is that if this dynamic is happening where the chair's deferring to the staff is oftentimes because the board chair doesn't have a lot of experience in leading a meeting or facilitating a meeting, and they also have some particular challenges based on the fact that its members of their family sitting around the table.

So I found that it can be a very worthwhile investment to work with a consultant or a professional just for a couple of hours on training on how you run board meetings. It can be just with a friend if you have somebody who knows how to do this. I'd go over how you facilitate, how you navigate issues -- giving the chair a chance to raise like particular questions they have about how to work with their particular board can be very, very effective and give that board chair the confidence and the tools to be able to step forward and lead the meeting effectively. I've found just like a short training can make all the difference in boosting that confidence and helping that person step into that role effectively.

Susan Price: That's a great suggestion, Karie. We assume everybody should know how to do this. Most of us don't know how when we first get into these roles.

Karie Brown: Yes.

Susan Price: Okay now I'm going to go to our operator. Do we have anybody waiting to ask a call - a question live?

Operator: Yes we do. Our first question will come from the line of Sharon Driscoll with BOA Merrill Lynch. Please proceed.

(Sharon Driscoll): Thanks very much. I actually have a couple questions, and one is very specific about the ground rules. Karie, do you think that it's better to start with a clean slate and let the family construct the ground rules or is it often good to start with something like you shared today, some generic ones and let people add or delete from the list?

((Crosstalk))

(Sharon Driscoll): ...said it was more robust when they were creating their own. I was just curious.

Karie Brown: Yes. I think that's an excellent question. Again, knowing what your board is like and how they work would influence how I would structure it.

Typically, I don't share this with board members in advance but I have it in my back pocket as a facilitator or if the chair is leading this I might share it with them so they have it. So if the board's having trouble coming up with ideas they can then share one or two items off of it to get the discussion going. Or if there are gaping holes in what the board comes up with in terms of its ground rules they can then raise it possibly as a suggestion. But I think it what you just said is absolutely critical. This really should be something that's owned by the particular board.

I like it to be a living document. So it's something that with the foundations I work with I come back to usually on an annual basis and say, "do these still hold? Is there something we want to change?" So to the extent that it can come from the folks themselves I really recommend that. But have this as a guideline so you make sure you're not leaving something off and you can also help generate the discussion.

(Sharon Driscoll): Okay that's great. Thank you. Could I just ask one more while it's open?

Susan Price: Go ahead.

(Sharon Driscoll): Karie, you had spoken about the focus on grantmaking. I think, Marla, you had talked about sometimes it can be evolutionary. So my question is: would you have found it more helpful to begin addressing some of the governance or more strategic issues earlier? Or is that sort of a natural evolution where the foundation and a family knew the immediate grantmaking is more likely to take preference and that's perfectly appropriate or would you have found it more effective...

Karie Brown: So it's kind of a both and answer I think. I do think that the grantmaking is a way that a lot of boards enter the discussion and you engage people and it's a natural way to start.

For our family foundation, where we made a mistake and where I think some other family foundations make mistakes, is when you feel like you have to go it on your own and you don't necessarily know the resources that are out there to guide you. I think we operated too much around our own table and didn't engage with organizations like the National Center for Family Philanthropy. We didn't talk to other foundations to see how they were doing it. So we probably waited a little too long and operated a little too much creating the wheel ourselves than we should have. But I will say that you it is a natural and evolutionary process. So it's kind of a balance between those two.

But I guess what I would encourage people is to recognize that there is this tendency to kind of delve fully into the front end of grantmaking and to be careful of getting stuck there, yes.

((Crosstalk))

Susan Price: Thanks for the question (Sharon). And I just wanted to add that I think the grantmaking is the fun part, and some of the other things like some of the sticky governance issues that involve the family are not as much fun. But putting them on the agenda earlier on, knowing that someday we're going to need to have dealt with this, saves you a lot of trouble later.

For example, we hear things like this all the time, somehow we just avoid that whole conversation about whether and how we feel about in our succession plan how we feel about adding spouses, and then we wait until cousin Jimmy is engaged to some lady we don't like to have that conversation. And it makes it much more awkward and personal. So to anticipate some of those other issues that are important for a foundation to address and do them early on before you get to that situation is really a good thing.

So anyway thanks for your question (Sharon).

Marla Bobowick: I was going to add one more way to make this practical, bring it down to the personal level. Sometimes the vice chair or vice president of the board doesn't have a designated role or maybe the secretary, make that somebody the keeper of the board governance issue. It doesn't mean that they're always bringing them up, but that they're the ones that sign up and follow governance issues. Somebody gets designated with that responsibility just to track them and throw some articles out to the trustees or to say "hey this is the time to talk about this" so that somebody is intentionally tracking it and it doesn't get neglected. So it's just a thought.

Susan Price: Great idea. Okay. I'm getting floods of emails. People want to remain confidential today. Actually here is a tip somebody contributed. This is on the subject of the reflection at the end of the board meeting.

“We found that a three question e-survey to board members following the meeting is effective and gives us richer feedback to inform future meetings rather than taking the time at the end of the meeting. Then the chair addresses that feedback in his or her President’s report at the beginning of the next meeting.” I thought that was a good tip.

I had a question about people who are at the board meeting as invited guests and their roles. Specifically we’re talking -- and this is not uncommon -- senior family members maybe who've been on the board before or who now are called Directors Emeritus. Sometimes they can dominate the discussion or keep the others, especially their own children, from speaking and disagreeing. So how can we address this that respects the work of the meeting as well as our senior leaders who are not at that point board members but they’re there?

Marla Bobowick: Oh that’s a tough one.

Karie Brown: So this is - yes. Marla, does that mean you want to jump in?

Marla Bobowick: No that means I'm tossing it to you.

Karie Brown: Okay. So I'll try to catch it as best I can. I'll just say this is not uncommon, and I think that it’s really important to think through and prepare for this possibility.

One, if there is emeritus status to be very clear in your policies about what the role and responsibility and rights of the person in that position - actually what they’re able to do and can do and should be doing, so that’s really clarified up front. This is what Susan said before; you want to think these issues through in advance before you get stuck in them. So have a policy about that. So oftentimes, for example, an emeritus person doesn't participate in decision-making and as long as that’s clear that then can free other people up.

There is also the issue of dominating the discussion and then the family and generational dynamics that come to play. Here’s where I think the ground rules are really, really critical. So if you have some of those dynamics you can have ground rules that everybody’s agreed to about participation. So, for example, some family foundations will ensure that in a discussion everybody has a chance to participate. They also talk about making sure that you’re not being repetitive and that you’re being constructive. These are obviously subjective judgments. But when that starts happening, you can point to the ground rules and say, “listen, we agreed that we were going to not repeat ourselves and that we were going to give everybody a chance to speak.” It’s a way of kind of controlling that situation without personalizing it too much.

I also think this is where if there’s a staff member they can be helpful in-between meetings -- talking to generational or members of a generation that might feel dominated, talking through their issues, helping them prepare,

helping them think through how they can contribute effectively and not get bowled over in that situation. Then talk to the older generation who might be in emeritus status about their role, about their responsibility and how they can really cultivate more effective participation by presenting what they have to offer but also giving other people a chance to grow in their position as new board members. Those are some ideas.

Susan Price: Okay. I have a question from someone who heard you talk about using technology. Karie, I think that was yours. But either of you might answer this. Do we have any advice on using video conferencing when members can't be face to face that don't want to just use teleconferences? Anybody have any experience with videoconferencing?

Marla Bobowick: I'll jump in. It's one of those things where it definitely helps to be able to see people.

Step one is just the technological capacity and people knowing how to use it. It can be really helpful. For shorter meetings I think it's easier if everybody's on videoconference and not some people in person and some people on video conference. It makes it hard to see, literally, depending on how you're set up. So, my ideal is either everybody's on videoconference or nobody is on videoconference.

One of the things about doing that is you have to make sure that materials are done well in advance, that you have someone facilitating and remembering to ask people on the videoconference if they have comments so that you don't exclude them from the conversation. Because it's a lot harder to jump in when you're sitting at a desk somewhere else.

Things like flip charts and parking lots are a little harder to maintain on the videoconference, but they can certainly be done. Maybe it's not the chair; it might be someone else who's really paying attention to making sure that the people on the screen are participating-- literally going around and saying, "Now Sally, do you have anything else you want to add?" Do a lot more intentional asking of questions to individuals as opposed to waiting for people to chime in. Even on this call you can tell it's harder to do that when you're not there in the same room at the same time. So again, it's not a perfect surrogate but better than nothing and sometimes it's just helpful because people want to see everybody. Karie, have you done that?

Karie Brown: I'd just add two things to that. The first one is: make sure people have some training about how to use them because I've found that then the technological problems and challenges can really negatively affect the flow of the meeting when people are struggling with technology. So give people some training and some tools in advance before you go that way. I totally agree with what Marla said.

The one caveat I would give is if you know you have to do a videoconference, I really recommend that you hold those stickier, more personal issues that might be challenging for the board until when you can be together in person, looking at each other and working together in person. It's very hard and I've found that it can create some longer-lasting residual negative effects if you try and have those kinds of conversations using video or teleconferencing.

Marla Bobowick: I would absolutely second that. One more thought would be that when you're done, ask people how they felt it worked. Evaluate the meeting. You don't know how people felt because you don't get that smile on the way out to the car or everyone going for a breakfast coffee. So I'd encourage just a little bit of more intentional follow-up afterwards to see how it felt. Then just practice it. You know, you might try a little bit of videoconferencing one on one so people are comfortable with it before you put everyone on.

Susan Price: This is Susan. One other thing we didn't talk much about was fun use of technology during the board meetings. I've heard families talk about as they bring on the younger generations who are more tech savvy than some of the rest of us and how they are more interested in some creative use of things like videos of site visits. I know one family in particular that we had on a teleconference where they talked about how the younger generation would videotape the grantees that they wanted to present so you got a better picture of what these grantees do and could introduce them to the rest of the board that way. Frankly it just made it more fun because it's just tedious to read through board dockets.

If anybody's interested in learning more about that, we did a teleconference on that in November 2008 with the folks from the Frieda Fox Family Foundation. They've totally involved their kids in this foundation and they've got a next generation group that is using Google docs to have meetings and to revise their documents while they're on the phone. They're using all kinds of ways to communicate. So it's getting easier and easier for people to do some of those things too including little simple video cameras. So that's just one more thought.

Okay. We have a couple of questions about the sensitivity issues. So this writer says "I'd love to hear more about creating a safety zone for sensitive issues. Do the speakers have specific examples of what has worked well?" Karie, in your family or with some of the families you worked with, have you seen the creating of the safety zone?

Karie Brown: It's really, really important that people think about these questions and recognize that family philanthropy can really touch upon very personal, political, emotional issues, so think carefully about how you address some of these topics and be prepared for them. I love the question.

So as I mentioned, this idea of a personal risk flag, that isn't something we've done with our family foundation, but I've seen it with other foundations where there was a lot of tension and some personal dynamics going on so that when you're saying something that you feel is particularly sensitive and you know it's a topic that might be difficult, you can alert people that you're taking that risk and that your stepping forward can shift the dynamic in the room. It gives individual members some control for when - of identifying when they are feeling sensitive about something. So having that personal risk flag is an understood tool so that board members can raise it and say "okay, here's what I'm feeling," and other people will pay attention. So that's one way that people help create their own safety zone.

Another piece is something that Marla talked about earlier: confidentiality. This is a long term kind of thing. It's really important that people trust that whatever does happen in that boardroom is confidential and that things aren't going to get aired in the larger family circle in a way that can come back and haunt or hurt somebody. So that's a general larger safety zone recommendation.

I think this is where some training for the chair can be really useful in terms of facilitation so that the chair or whoever's facilitating is paying attention to the dynamics in the room and they're recognizing when something's getting tense or difficult. I often find that just by naming it you can diffuse it and say "listen, I know that this a challenging issue and we have differing opinions on this." Then they can own that and acknowledge it and then help people move through it. That's a time where I suggest allowing people to go around the room so that everybody gets a say in a measured way. I think putting a timeframe on that, where everybody says their piece for two minutes and everybody has a chance to speak, that can work well.

The other thing that we recommend is that when these kind of things come up, if the chair can sense or even someone else that it's not something you can get through at that point, using the parking lot-- but really being clear and explicit that we're not pushing this off onto the side but rather that we can feel that this is a tough issue. Let's talk about it at our next meeting and let's hear everybody's suggestions for how we can go through this. Maybe you bring in outside resources, maybe you have a facilitator, or maybe there are some preparatory materials that give people different vantage points, maybe people write something up in between. So you then handle that issue in a really intentional and focused way but don't try and go into it at that moment.

So those are all some suggestions. Marla I know you've worked with the index cards. Maybe you can talk through that.

Marla Bobowick: Sure, so there are a few things. The index cards are one solution where you have people write down what they would have said next. If you hit a sensitive

issue, writing it down forces people to organize their thoughts in a slightly less emotional way. An index card limits how much they can say.

Once I was working with a very large board and still all family but it was a large board, third-generation, I think – and I collected the index cards and redistributed them and people had to read other people’s words. That automatically puts you in somebody else’s mindset, trying to understand what they meant. This group was really good. They didn’t try to figure out who said what, which is a natural inclination. But it really forces you to think about it from a different perspective. And it prevents people from grandstanding or getting too emotional so that you can at least sort of see what everybody in the room had to say without it becoming too caught up in the heat of the moment.

Then you could have that next conversation: what we want to do about this. If you pick up on Karie’s idea, name it so we can tame it, the index cards are about that: name it and narrow in on what is the real issue. Then have a creative conversation about what are the obstacles to dealing with this? You’re not going to try to solve the now but let’s at least figure what the obstacles are. The third part of that is what might be the potential solutions? Say, “We’re not going to find the solutions now, but let’s get everyone’s creative ideas about how we can deal with this and sit with it for a bit.” These are very process orientated ways of dealing with these conversations.

Some other things I’ve seen that work well are, if you put it on the parking lot for the future, is to find some good articles to help everyone step back a little bit and read about it. Sometimes there are good case studies whether it’s a real one or you can get a consultant to help you write something that can show the different perspective or finding another family foundation person who can come and share. They don’t just share their answer; they show how they got to a resolution on it.

One other sort of fun exercise that diffuses a lot of it is, say if it’s a really sensitive issue, to ask what the completely irrational solution to this is, or for the perfect best solution, in an ideal world. Have everybody write down what they want to happen about it. Then say “Now, that’s an irrational dream. Let’s talk about what’s a reasonable or rational expectation.” You can start to see how far apart some of those things might be. It’s just a way to have some of these difficult conversations with some sort of structured methodology.

Some things you’re never going to be able to resolve perfectly. But if you can agree to disagree or set it aside or say we’re going to deal with it but we’re going to deal with it next meeting and we’re going to start with it so that we can get through it and lay out how we’re going to get there.

Even online email surveys or thoughts could be helpful. If it’s a family everyone knows who everyone is, but at least everyone has an equal voice in

that setting. You can start to see what the array of opinions is before you start to make decisions.

Susan Price: Okay. Back to the sensitivity, as you were describing how to handle it, Karie, somebody emailed me and said she uses the ouch rule.

It's agreed in the ground rules that anyone can say "ouch!" if the subject is too raw and it stops the discussion and then you can talk about what's happening and why this is sensitive. By the way that person also wrote in a tip for the other conversation about guests at the board meeting. There could be a time on the agenda for guest comments and a time limit. This gives them space to speak but hopefully contains it. So I thought that was a good tip too.

Karie Brown: Great. Good. Yes.

Susan Price: All right and I had an email, this came in ahead of time, so let me find this one. "Please address the question of protocol and practice regarding making changes to the consent agenda." You might even want to explain that, if it needs it. Marla, if you could do that?

Marla Bobowick: Sure.

Susan Price: The right of a board member to question any part of a report, the timing for when you raise the issue, so forth.

Marla Bobowick: So for those who don't know consent to agenda's a pretty old parliamentary trick. The materials obviously go out in advance for the board meeting, and you say these items are on our consent agenda or consent calendar and they're going to be approved as a block. So things like board meeting minutes or committee reports or basic routine business. You're not going to put anything controversial on there. There are all the backups and it says that we're going to approve them all in one vote so you don't have to spend five minutes taking votes for five different items. So the basic ground rules are the material has to go out in advance.

When you're ready, you know, you're in the meeting and the chair says "okay, we're going to vote on the consent calendar consent agenda, does anyone want to remove any items on there?" Then if anyone wants to remove anything they can. Anybody can say "I'd like to remove this from the consent calendar." They're not going to explain why and they're not going to get into it. They just say I'm going to remove it so that you can then vote on everything else on the consent calendar.

After that, you go to why they removed it and what the issue was and decide are if you're going to deal with it today, or deal with it later. Sometimes it might just be because there's a typo in the minutes or it could be a vote wasn't

recorded properly or they think it needs to be a discussion. Then the chair and the group decide how to proceed with it.

There's a great white paper on the BoardSource Web site at BoardSource.org that's free to anybody that explains rules for how to make a consent agenda work and when to use it and when not to. They're really handy just to get through routine stuff so you don't have to waste that precious face time looking at a lot of details and going through a lot of procedural rigmarole when you really need to deal with, you know, "gee are we going to start a new grantmaking program area" or "we really need to understand our pay out for next year" or some of the bigger issues.

So I don't know if that really answers it. Susan, were there other parts of that question that would be helpful?

Susan Price: No that was exactly right. The question was if you're using them, where does somebody get to say "wait a second that's too important to be there." But it's a great tool for getting rid of a whole bunch of little stuff in a hurry.

Marla Bobowick: Yes and then if people have questions in advance obviously they can call and if they have questions of clarification those might be quickly dispensed with and it goes back on the consent calendar. That's the only time when I think you put it back on.

Susan Price: Okay. Let me end with one question that I thought was interesting that was emailed about some good tools, practices, or gimmicks to make sure all voices are heard. We've talked about that a little bit but she's specifically asking about exercises like values cards to identify similarities and differences in family member's values and priorities.

I know for example we've mentioned this before that 2164, the organization that is part of Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies has a set of values cards that are used sometimes as an exercise to show a multigenerational family where the differences are in terms of people's values and motivations and so forth when they're younger and older. I just heard of a family foundation the other day that had everybody at the board meeting take the Myers-Briggs. Then they kind of understood oh, this is the way your mind works. This is the way you are. And this is the way I am. It's not like one's right or wrong, it's just we are we approach things differently because of our personality profile. I've seen it done with communications exercises as well. So anything that particularly comes to mind in either of your cases that are things you've used effectively?

Marla Bobowick: Well I've got something, I can't say I've used it with a family foundation but it works well with groups where there's a lot of different levels of knowledge and perspective. It's called a World Café, you can Google it. It's a procedure

where you break into smaller groups. It might be tables of three or four. This is obviously going to work better with a large group.

You put out some big picture questions. What's most important to preserve about the foundation or donor intent. You ask people to talk in a table of three or four for 15 minutes about it. They doodle on a flip chart or a big sheet of paper and they talk about it. Then everyone moves to a different table in a different order so you're reconfiguring the groups of people. You can either ask the same question or build on that one. You end up with this collective picture; again it's a little California-ish. But I've done it with scientists. I've done it with social justice organizations – it works with everybody.

You then sort of see how ideas percolate and it gives everyone a chance to talk. It's at a personal level where some people aren't going to be comfortable challenging Grandpa at the table or a spouse might not be comfortable saying something that's contrary to what the rest of the family seems to think in front of everybody but they might be willing to do it in a smaller setting. And it's a little bit visual. It's got a creative element. I think it gives some of the younger generation a different way of interacting. It might be harder for people that are very literal and linear because it's kind of messy. But you see the themes that pop out of it, and you can see where there are differences of opinion to talk about.

Susan Price: This is Susan. I used it at a session at a conference not long ago. But it would be difficult if your foundation board was real small. You need a certain concentration of people. But if you want to know more about that you can go to worldcafe.com and they have a whole little thing there that explains how this works.

Karie, anything else from you?

Karie Brown: Yes. I just would add one other exercise that does work well with a smaller family foundation that makes sure everybody participates. Let's say you have a couple of questions: you might be talking about succession, you might be talking about longer term strategic thinking... you have a couple of questions that you're trying to address.

I like using a flip chart and putting those questions up on a wall somewhere and then giving people fairly large stickies. Let's say the question is, "where do you want to see the foundation in the next five years programmatically or institutionally?" So let's say those are your two questions. Each person would then write out -- and they'd have a sticky for each primary idea-- up to three ideas of what they'd want to see for the foundation. Then they each go up and put their stickies up there. I've done it both ways where you either have the person read their own ideas or you'd have somebody else read their ideas.

What's really nice is when -- you can break it into two small groups or you can do it as a group—you have people go through those ideas and think about how they group together, how they connect, what are the outliers, where is there some real synchronicity and direction?

So I find that that works really well to make sure everybody's participating and for the group to start to see where there's kind of a natural linkage and some coming together and where there's some questions. You can identify those things that need some more attention or research because they might not be in line with what other people are thinking.

Susan Price: Okay. I'm going to throw one more thought in about making meetings inspirational. I was on a board of a non-profit but there had been a founder who was long deceased but who had written quite a bit. Every meeting that I went to, the board chair took a little snippet from that person's words and read them to us to focus us on why we were there and what the real important mission of our organization was. It really did help people put away some of the petty stuff and really think about the big picture.

So if that's helpful that might be another tidbit if your founder has written or if you have the words of the founder that can be shared, that's another nice inspiration. It could be some wonderful thing from a grantee.

Karie Brown: Yes. I was going to say along those lines we at every board meeting share one or more quotes from our grantees that come out through the reports or come out from something they've published. That really helps us ground us in the purpose of our work and keeps that inspirational perspective in mind.

Susan Price: Great. All right, thank you both so much. This was a wonderfully rich call. I really appreciate you all, Karie and Marla, being on the call with us, and also our audience for good questions.

So hope I'll hear everyone again next month and goodbye everybody.

Karie Brown: Thank you.

Marla Bobowick: Thank you.

END