

The Harris and Eliza Kempner Fund is a family foundation focusing its grant-making efforts on the greater Galveston, Texas, area. Board and family members reside in locations throughout the country. The Fund has developed the following model for involving current and future generations of family members in the work of the foundation.

The Harris and Eliza Kempner Fund has a professional staff of one (plus 1 1/2 support) and 43 family members of the third and fourth generation who are eligible to be trustees. There are nine trustees on the board, seven of whom are family. Up until 1988 trustees served for life. Two changes approved that year allow more rotation on the board: a mandatory retirement age (75) and nine-year terms (three family trustees were grandfathered and are exempt from the nine-year term limitation). Even with these changes, opportunities to serve are few and far between.

In 1990 the trustees approved Chairman Nonie Thompson's plan to establish advisory committees to provide opportunities for nontrustee family members to experience the grant process. Once a year three committees meet: one to select candidates for the Fund's student loan program and two to review grant requests related to environmental protection, population control, and third world development. There are 12-15 participants each year. They receive 4-6 grant requests to review and recommend. Their packets include suggestions for grant evaluation and information on how to review financial statements. Their committee's allocation is always less than the total being requested, so the members discuss, debate, and make the difficult allocation decisions. When time allows at their meeting, a workshop is provided on a subject relevant to foundation/philanthropic issues.

The value of this program is that the participants have an opportunity to find out if they have any interest in foundation matters. Those who do are easily identified: they sign up year after year, arrive with their homework done, take seriously the deliberation process, and understand the implications of their decisions. The advisory committee meetings usually occur in the same time frame as family business meetings and other family gatherings, allowing them to visit with trustees and other family members, many of whom have their own foundations. The executive director has frequent opportunities to interact with them.

When the time comes to consider a replacement trustee, the trustees have a short list, with all the candidates having a proven interest in and aptitude for trusteeship.