



# *PASSAGES Issue Brief*

EXPLORING KEY ISSUES IN FAMILY GIVING

## Thrive at Five: The Secrets of Long-Term Family Philanthropy

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Want a family foundation that withstands the test of time, distance, generations, and family branches?

These long-time family foundations share their secrets for making it to five generations and beyond.

# Introduction

If you are a newer family foundation with one or two generations on the board, five generations may seem like a long time away. Yet in family philanthropy, quite a few foundations have been operating and thriving for 50, 75, even 100 years.

What's the secret of these family philanthropies that make it five generations or more? How do they stay united over time, over generations, and across family branches? How do they successfully attract and engage younger family members?



This *Passages Issue Brief* features family foundations that have made it to Gen Five (or who are well on their way). You will learn what they attribute as the qualities that have held their family foundation together over time—and the challenges they have faced in doing so.

Whether you are a newer family philanthropy, or a multiple generations foundation, this *Passages* will help you plan ahead for how you want your family foundation to look and operate as you grow. Learn from what others have done—and continue to do—to sustain a successful long-term family philanthropy.

## ***Here are the top 8 secrets these family foundations shared:***

1. Establish proactive policies and practices.
2. Place a premium on younger members.
3. Honor the different generations.
4. Keep the focus on family and place.
5. Honor the family's personal style.
6. Regularly reflect on and reaffirm core values.
7. Spend time together sharing stories.
8. Resolve family conflicts.

If you are a newer family foundation with one or two generations on the board, five generations may seem like a long time away. Yet in family philanthropy, quite a few foundations have been operating and thriving for 50, 75, even 100 years.

# Establish proactive policies and practices.

When it comes to family foundations that last, they all share one thing in common: good governance policies and practices. Family foundation boards that have clear policies in place—those that everyone knows and agrees upon—will help keep things running smoothly and avoid potential upsets.

The first question to consider—and reconsider time and again, as the foundation grows—is whether or not to exist in perpetuity. The answer to this one question alone will ripple out into your decisions on governance policies. Long-time family foundations recommend discussing perpetuity every five to seven years—and deciding whether or not it’s the right course for the family and the board.

Beyond that big and ever-present question, there are a host of other governance policies to put into place if you haven’t done so already. These include policies on

- board size and meetings;
- eligibility, term limits and rotation rules;
- board compensation and reimbursement;
- board member roles and responsibilities;
- board effectiveness; and
- policies on managing difficult situations.



Fourth Generation family members of the Lawrence Welk Foundation

“When I came on as board president, we implemented proactive policies and practices,” says Lisa Parker, president of the Lawrence Welk Foundation. “We now have guidelines for everything, such as who can serve on the board, what the nominations process is, and what happens in situations of divorce and separation.”

## BUILT TO LAST

When families are supported by a sound organizational structure (i.e., policies and procedures, effective operations), they tend to get along better—and the foundation is more likely to last.

According to a study for NCFP’s *Generation of Giving: Transitions in Family Foundations* (2006), researchers found that **good organizational performance creates good emotional experiences and commitment among family members.** Most professionals and practitioners in the field assume the opposite: that good grantmaking grows out of good family relations and processes. While good process is important—a basic ability to work together, to have meetings, etc.—what matters more for continuity is how effective the foundation is *as an organization.*

When families invest time and resources in developing the foundation, its mission, its leadership, its structure, and the way it does its work, they create a sense of pride and engagement among family members—one that carries forward into generations to come.



Lawrence Welk Foundation supporting Syrian families

It was a time of challenge that prompted the board to create these policies. “When the third generation graduated from the junior board to full board members, our board size jumped to 13,” says Parker. “Yet it wasn’t necessarily everyone’s desire or choice to go on the full board. It happened at a time when people were starting careers, going to graduate school, and starting families. As a result, there were big gaps in people’s motivation to participate.”

“We decided to limit the number of board seats and create terms. This made it okay for someone to opt out of board service, and remain connected to the family. People were relieved that they could serve when they wanted, rather than feel obligated,” says Parker. “Having more structure created more freedom.”

Currently, the board of directors has 7-10 seats comprising family members (direct descendants and their spouses), and at least one member of each of the three family branches. The foundation also has modeled itself as a membership organization for those who are direct descendants of Lawrence Welk. These members have two foundation jobs: they approve changes to the bylaws and vote in the new board of directors. This membership structure engages those family members who are not currently on the board, she says.

A good governance structure also creates trust among family members. Frank Wideman, III, president of The Self Family Foundation, speaks to the importance of sound policies, especially when planning for a leadership transition.

“A few years ago, as the fourth generation began to show more interest in leading, we set up a succession plan and restructured the governance system,” he says. “We decided to continue to organize by family branches. Each branch has one seat on the board. It’s up to each family branch to determine who will represent the branch. For the most part, the family branch seats are occupied by the third generation. We then increased the size of the board by creating at-large seats to accommodate those members of the fourth generation who showed the interest and commitment to serve. This facilitated the integration of the fourth generation into the work of the foundation, and that has helped us get to where we are now.”

By creating these policies and practices up front, family foundations can minimize and mitigate potential conflicts later on. For example, in the Self Family Foundation, when a long-time third generation board chair passed away, the board decided her brother would take over for a two-year period, and then transition the leadership to the fourth generation. This plan managed everyone’s expectations for the future, and provided an easy and clear path for the fourth generation to take over.

“Board members today have all grown up with the foundation, and formed strong relationships with their cousins. They come together four times a year, and have built a level of trust and understanding,” says Wideman. The board policies and practices have promoted that trust, within and across generations, he says.

# Place a premium on younger members.

The Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities has been operating 72 years and counting. This foundation, headquartered in Greenville, Delaware, comprises nearly 125 voting family members across the country, with the fourth and fifth generations now leading the charge.

What's the secret to how they've lasted this long?

"We place a premium on the youngest members of the family," says Kerry Alys Robinson, fourth generation family member, and founding executive director of Leadership Roundtable. "Elevating those in their teens and early 20s has been part of our family culture as long as I've been alive and conscious, and it works."

Robinson became actively involved in the family foundation at the young age of 14. "I can't recall a time I didn't know about the foundation. My dad brought my brother and me to foundation meetings as kids. We grew up with it. All children are raised with the foundation as part of what it means to belong to this family."

Involving children early started with the founders. In 1945, Robinson's great grandparents—John Jakob Raskob and Helena Raskob—founded the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities with two goals in mind: 1) that all resources be used to support the Catholic Church, and anything that falls within that scope, and 2) that each of their direct descendants be stewards of the foundation's resources.

John and Helena had 13 children, and immediately involved them in the foundation, says Robinson. One of those children—her grandmother, who was the



John Jakob Raskob and Helena Raskob,  
founders of the Raskob Foundation

second generation—had 14 children. These siblings formed many family branches, and the extended family grew quickly.

125 family members is a lot of people, especially when they are spread across the country. For any foundation, this would be a challenge. However, the Raskob Foundation has set up a system that trains new family members while keeping seasoned members engaged. It starts with an apprenticeship.

"When a direct descendant of the founders turns 18, they are invited to serve the foundation as a volunteer member (distinct from a board member). If that person says yes, he or she undergoes a three-year apprenticeship period, during which time he or she gains increasing levels of responsibility. The foundation also offers a mentorship program. Young members choose an older family member—typically an aunt, uncle, cousin or grandparent—to mentor them on everything about the foundation," says Robinson.

**"When you empower young adults through meaningful leadership, they are much more likely to stay with philanthropy longer."**

*—Kerry Alys Robinson, Raskob Foundation*

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—Kerry Alys Robinson,  
Raskob Foundation



This mentoring is an important part of the family culture, allowing younger family members to learn the grantmaking ropes while deepening relationships with elders. In each grant cycle, the board assigns the apprentice proposals to co-review alongside his or her mentor. Additionally, new apprentices attend a two-day orientation with their 18-year old cousins, encouraging them to build their own cohort with peers.

When three years are up, the apprentice can elect to become an “active member” of the foundation. Active status means they are voting members, and they are eligible to be nominated to the board. According to Robinson, members must recommit each year to remain active, and only active members can vote.

Once the apprenticeship is over, the foundation continues to focus on its young family members. “We encourage members in their early 20s to chair a committee or represent the family at a conference. This can be intimidating to young adults, yet we want our youngest members to have meaningful leadership opportunities right out of the gate.”

It feels good to entrust leadership to young cousins and children, she adds. “We let them be nervous and make mistakes—that’s part of it. Yet, we empower them. It has such lasting benefits. When you are 22 and your whole extended family trusts you to represent the foundation at a conference or make site visits on your own—you feel grown up. You recognize the privilege of leadership.”

She recalled a recent moment where she watched her young son review the board docket responsibly in front of the group. “It brought tears to my eyes, and the eyes of the other adult family members in the room. We remember being that young and how it felt to be doing this work for the first time.”

According to Robinson, the foundation has an unspoken practice: “We tend to preferentially weight a proposal if a young adult is championing it,” she says. “If any family member feels passionately about a proposal, it tends to have a stronger chance of being funded. However we definitely give an edge to young adults voicing why a certain proposal matters to them. The younger you are, the floor is yours.”

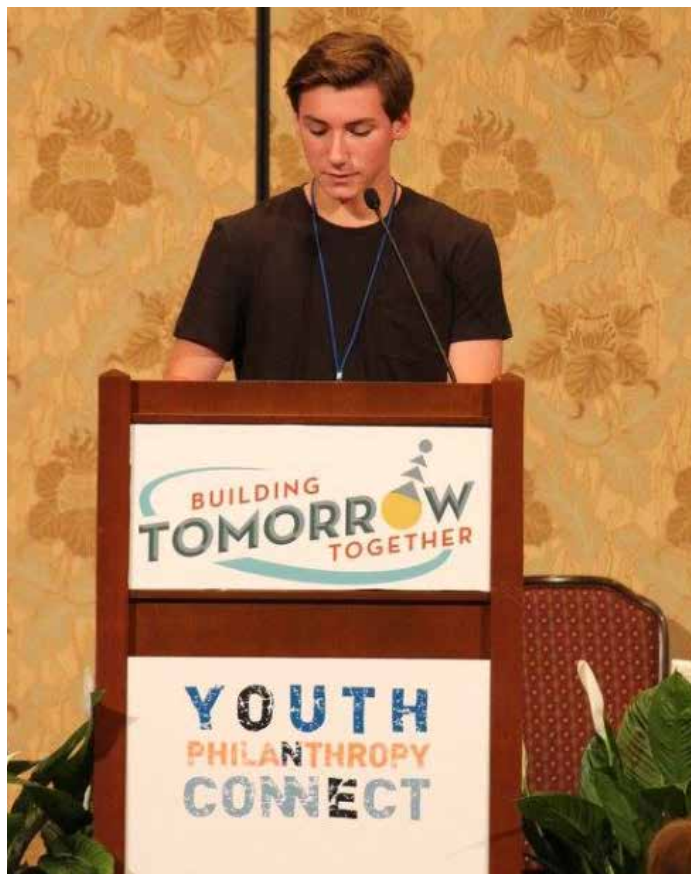
In doing so, she says, the foundation emboldens young adults in the family that their voice truly matters. This gives them the confidence to step into board service, if elected, and take on other leadership roles.

“When you empower young adults through meaningful leadership, they are much more likely to stay with philanthropy longer. That’s certainly been the case with our family,” she says. “Members tend to stay with the work of the foundation for the rest of their lives.”

# Honor the different generations.

When Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez discovered gas and oil on their ranch on the border of Mexico and Texas, they became multimillionaires overnight. However their values didn't change. When it came to the community, they lived by the motto: "We take care of each other." Those same values have carried through multiple generations, and influenced how they embrace the community today.

"Every single time we sit down to make a decision, we ask ourselves: 'what would Lupe and Lilia do?' This is their legacy that we're honoring. Keeping the family intact was important to them, and by doing so, we keep their memories alive," says Ana Gonzalez, third generation family board member of The Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Foundation.



Brendan Adams, Junior Board Member

“Being a part of this family foundation has made us stronger as a family. We’ve gained insights from one another that we otherwise wouldn’t have, and we’ve come to respect the differences in our generations.”

—Brendan Adams, Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Foundation

“We want to honor their generation. Times were tough for them, and they persevered. When things were good, they gave back. I never knew who they were, but because of them, I have this opportunity to give back to people who need it,” says Brendan Adams, age 17, a fourth generation family member who sits on the foundation’s junior board.

Adams has been involved with the foundation since he was 13, along with his cousin Nadia Gonzalez, who was 10 when she started three years ago.

“Our grandparents wanted to involve us in the foundation and teach us about it. We attended a youth philanthropy conference, and I fell in love with it. I was able to take the skills I learned from other young philanthropists, and bring those back to our family foundation,” says Adams. As the two members of the junior board, the teens both receive \$1000 each year from the board, and together, decide how to allocate it.

Working in a family setting with multiple generations is not without its challenges. There can be differences in expectations and communication styles. “In the beginning, we had to have some give and take when it came to communication and expectations simply because of the age differences and personality types,” says Ana Gonzalez. “My mom grew up in a generation before technology became what it is now. Learning styles were different, as well. When the kids went to the youth philanthropy conference, she told them she wanted a full-page written report on what they learned. I had to step in, telling her that the kids needed to explain what they learned in their own way, in a way that they felt comfortable.” This was a difficult conversation, she says, yet it led to the entire board learning how to communicate better. “It’s important for generations to respect each other,” she says.

One way to show young family members respect is to invite them in—the earlier, the better. In the



Cousins Nadia Gonzalez and Brendan Adams

Martinez Foundation, there is no age limit for when a young family member can join the junior board. “If we think they are ready, we bring them on,” says Ana Gonzalez. “They need to first show enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.”

“The younger you are, the more imagination you have, the more you can take in, and the more room there is to grow,” says Adams. His cousin Nadia Gonzalez agrees. “It’s like manners. If you grow up learning about good manners, it comes naturally later on. That’s how this family foundation has come for Brendan and me. We’ve been involved for a few years, and now it’s second nature.”

Watching the kids evolve and take on more responsibility has been exciting, says Ana Gonzalez. “Teaching them skills for running a family foundation translates into decisions they will have to make later in life. We are educating them without yet sending them to college.”

Starting young has one more added benefit: it builds relationships across generations. “Being a part of this family foundation has made us stronger as a family. We’ve gained insights from one another that we otherwise wouldn’t have, and we’ve come to respect the differences in our generations,” says Adams. “What we do is a team effort. We’re all working together to achieve the same goal, and that ties the generations together, strengthening our bonds.”



# Keep the focus on family and place.

At the Fleishhacker Foundation in San Francisco, founded in 1947 by Mortimer Fleishhacker, Sr., family members typically serve on the board for a long, long time. According to John Ehrlich, a fourth generation family member, “My mom was on the board for 46 years; her brother Mort for 43. I joined in 1979, making that 38 years, and counting, for me.”

Ehrlich attributes the foundation’s longevity to the founder’s strong values: keeping the family together, focused on one place. “While my great grandfather didn’t have one particular charitable priority, family was very important to him,” says Ehrlich. “He bought a property in Woodside, California, intending that his family would be there together each summer. That worked for generations, and continues to this day. I grew up knowing my cousins, my uncles, and my extended family—just as my great grandfather intended. He valued family. He took care of his family members, including those who faced problems.”



[Fleishhacker historical photo](#)

Next to family, giving within the San Francisco Bay Area was the most important thing to the founder, and that has been communicated throughout the generations, says Ehrlich.

Mortimer Fleishhacker, Sr. was of a generation that encountered a lot of anti-Semitism around the U.S., says Ehrlich. “In the Gold Rush and its aftermath, there wasn’t an entrenched society in

“The foundation greatly expanded my connection with our family. Without the foundation, I wouldn’t know more than a few of my second cousins. The foundation brings us all together. It has functionally kept 91 family members very well connected.”

—Michael Meadows,  
Former Family Trustee,  
Meadows Family Foundation

San Francisco. Jewish entrepreneurs like my great grandfather could come to San Francisco and be free from the discrimination they faced in other parts of the country. Fleishhacker was a venture capitalist entrepreneur, who created his assets through construction of major paper mills in California, Oregon, and Nevada. “San Francisco was a place where he had freedom and economic opportunity, and for that reason, my great grandfather felt it was important to give back to this town and the surrounding area. It’s a value we all believe in to this day.”

One challenge of a long-lasting foundation is keeping the mission interesting for all family members, in spite of the geographic spread. “Five of the family members on our board don’t live in the Bay area, and there are only a few people alive today who knew my great grandfather personally. That’s a challenge, because our grantmaking is focused strictly on one place: The Bay Area. We wonder: how will we keep the place-based mission relevant for extended family members over time?”

To counter this challenge, the foundation currently offers discretionary grants of \$5K to each board member. Board members can opt to give their discretionary grants to any 501(c)(3) anywhere in the U.S.—it doesn’t have to be in the Bay Area.

Additionally, the board requires its members to average at least three hours per month volunteering with any nonprofit organization in their local area (including those outside the Bay Area). “We’ve found this helps board members learn about their own communities and stay engaged in the work of the foundation. It improves their grantmaking, giving them a better perspective on what nonprofits face.”

Outside of the small time commitment required, it’s not hard to be on the board, says Ehrlich. “We rely heavily on our nonfamily staff to do a lot of the research and analysis, which, for the board, keeps grantmaking simple and straightforward,” he says. “Some people have left over the years because of different personalities or dynamics, however, for the most part, family members join the board and stay on the board.”



Founder Mortimer Fleishhacker Sr.



Fleishhacker Foundation Board

# Honor the family's personal style.

The Siragusa Family Foundation is similar to the Fleishhacker Foundation in that it has a joint focus on family and geographical location. According to John Hicks, third generation family member and current executive director, “It was extremely important to my grandfather Ross D. Siragusa, Sr. (the founder) that the family be involved in the foundation and to help the underserved people of Chicago. That’s why we’ve continued on so long as a foundation—we are family focused, and we want to maintain our family’s lasting connection to Chicago.”



The board currently has five third-generation members and five fourth-generation members, as well as two nonfamily members. Hicks says the family board does better with a more casual approach to their conversations, rather than something more formal or facilitated.

“Over the past 30 years or so, we have had several facilitated strategic planning sessions, where we formed our mission and value statements. Recently, due to a leadership change, the third and fourth generation got together in a less structured setting, and accomplished much more,” he says.

Hicks commented that no one wants to mention the two words *strategic planning*. “We know what we need to do, and we do it in our own way, one that matches our family style.” Family members don’t respond well to structured settings, he says, especially if they have to do it in the corporate world. The board calls their conversations “check-ins,” which includes time to reflect about where the foundation has been and where it’s going.

“We ask: ‘what does everyone think about what we’re doing here? Are we all still in agreement? What has changed/should change?’” Hicks says.

Only direct descendants may serve as voting members on the board. “We all agree that if family members are not involved in the foundation, it should be wound down,” he says. “I’ve spent 25 years on the board, and I’ve recently taken on the role of executive director. When I decide to retire, if there is not enough interest from the fourth generation in continuing, then we will sunset the foundation,” he says. The foundation, he says, always remains open to evolving, and changing its funding focus if family members in time show interest elsewhere.

“What’s the glue that keeps us together? It’s family,” he says, and that means embracing the family’s preferred approach to the foundation. “We emphasize the importance of *family*, and The Siragusa Family Foundations’ name.”

**“We know what we need to do, and we do it in our own way, one that matches our family style.”**

—John Hicks, *The Siragusa Family Foundation Executive Director*

## Regularly reflect on and reaffirm core values.

The Self Family Foundation is a 75-year-old place-based funder serving a two-to-three county area in and around Greenwood, South Carolina. According to President Frank Wideman, III, a long-time nonfamily staff member, it was always the intention that the money go to the community where the founder James C. Self created the wealth.

What has worked well for the Self Family Foundation so far, he says, is that the family regularly reflects on—and reaffirms—its core values. This has been going on for 20 years.



The foundation holds a retreat every two or three years to discuss core values. At the retreats, family members—with the help of a skilled facilitator—take time to both look back and look forward. “We review what the foundation has done for the past couple of years—what we did well, and not so well. Then we plan our priorities for the next two or three years, creating a work plan,” says Wideman. “It’s a process that everyone buys into.”

Taking this periodic time for reflecting and planning keeps the family engaged and foundation intact. “These retreats have

“For a family foundation to last, the board must have consensus around core values. That’s the first thing you have to do—and then you reflect on, refine, and reinforce those values every two or three years. Ask yourselves: how do we operate together? What are we doing well, not so well? What’s our direction and priorities going forward? This kind of reflection and planning creates family cohesiveness.”

—Frank Wideman, III,  
Self Family Foundation

enabled the family to maintain its cohesive approach, and create more consensus in grantmaking,” says Wideman.

Consensus voting may be unusual, he says, but it’s the culture of the family. “Nobody brings his or her own agenda or pet projects. We invite proposals from the community and we look for opportunities. The board relies heavily on the staff to vet proposals, and has a specific process to determine what goes before the board.” This process, he says, helps the family reach a consensus vote.

“They see the foundation as the touchstone that holds the family together. It’s a collective effort, and no individual is bigger than the foundation as a whole. These are the values they reaffirm, and the way they are comfortable operating.”

Wideman says one of the next generation members calls the foundation Switzerland because it’s so neutral. “It’s a place they can leave the disagreements that arise in the family business behind, and do something together that is positive. For us, it’s worked,” says Wideman. “Without our strong commitment to core values, the foundation may not have lasted this long.”

## GEOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES AS GENERATIONS GROW

As family foundations grow into their fourth, fifth, even sixth generations, geographic dispersion is more common—making it more challenging for family branches to stay connected to each other, to the foundation, and to the original community or place of focus.

At the Self Family Foundation, operating for 75 years in Greenwood, South Carolina, the fourth generation is now preparing to lead. “Up until now, there has been a strong connection to the community we serve, and the foundation hasn’t faced any geographic pressures,” says long-time nonfamily staff Frank Wideman III, president of the foundation. That could change though.



“The third generation of the family grew up here and stayed here. The fourth generation grew up here, and all but two of them have moved away. They maintain a deep connection to this area, and are now preparing to lead the foundation. The fifth generation, some in college, some still toddlers, may easily move out of this community and lose the connection.”

What can happen in situations like this, says Wideman, is the family members may break up the foundation, spend out, or each want their own discretionary pot of money. That hasn’t happened yet, but remains to be seen, he says.

“So far, none of the fifth generation has shown an interest in the foundation. I hope that will change in time, as they grow older and their parents take an active role in engaging their interest. However, once you get into the fifth and sixth generation and a family disperses, losing its connection, it can become problematic. “What works now is the board’s collective decisionmaking. If family members develop separate interests apart from the agreed-upon interests of the foundation, it will create new challenges that this foundation hasn’t yet faced.”

# Spend time together sharing stories.

Family foundation members who play together may be better equipped to stay together.

“For us, what has made all the difference is time together,” says Lisa Parker, president of the Lawrence Welk Family Foundation. “We fund in Southern California, and getting into the multiple generations, we wouldn’t otherwise know our cousin’s kids that live in Montana. The foundation meetings and the family reunions every year allow our family to nurture those relationships. We allot time for each other, and have a structure that supports the family growing together.”



Lawrence Welk Foundation junior board

During annual family reunions, members participate in a philanthropic activity as a group. At their last reunion, this activity was to celebrate the family history—“the ties and stories we are all part of, regardless of the foundation,” says Parker. The natural byproduct to sharing stories, she says, is a sustained interest in the foundation and what it’s doing. “Sharing and celebrating our history is part of the legacy of our grandparents and parents—it’s a value that has passed down through the generations.”

Sharing stories comes natural to this family. “Inevitably when we get together, there are stories, and we reminisce about those who aren’t here anymore,” says Parker. It’s an ongoing project to share the family history, she says, and we are becoming more intentional about it.

“We know from studies that kids who are more aware of their family history grow up more resilient. These kids hear that other members of the family have had good times and bad times, and that helps them overcome the challenges they will experience in their own lives.”

—Lisa Parker, Lawrence Welk Foundation

For example, the foundation often plans its family reunions around certain themes; last year, the theme was family history. “I found and shared a videotape my uncle had made in 1984, where he interviewed my grandparents about their lives. One of the questions he asked my grandparents was: What would you want your grandchildren’s children to know? To which my late grandmother, in the video, answered: If they aren’t doing good in the world, I’ll come back and haunt them!”

At the same gathering, Parker also shared old videos of *The Lawrence Welk Show*—“the Christmas episodes that we (the third generation) participated on as kids,” she says. “If you can share your most awkward pictures and videos and laugh about it as a family, so much richness can come out of it.”

Another year the family held a scavenger hunt, where family members had to not only come back with specific items related to their philanthropy, but also come up with a story about their grandparents. “Even I heard stories I never heard before, and the kids who didn’t know my grandparents became more engaged, simply by listening to those stories.”

This past year, the foundation hired a consultant firm to collect, cultivate, and characterize the family

history. “This involved a special session for the fourth generation where we asked them to reflect on the stories they’ve heard of our grandparents, and answer questions such as: What similar qualities do they see in themselves? What is their story in relation to this family?”

Asking these questions and sharing stories are important, she says. “We know from studies that kids who are more aware of their family history grow up more resilient. These kids hear that other members of the family have had good times and bad times, and that helps them overcome the challenges they will experience in their own lives,<sup>1</sup>” says Parker.

“Sharing stories and videos has been pivotal for our family. It’s brought us together in a new way, and given us a new sense of shared history,” says Parker. “Celebrating history has gelled the generations.”

Although the stories originally focused on the founders—Parker’s grandparents—the storytelling process has had an added benefit: It’s made room for older living family members to open up and talk about their hopes and wishes for the family and foundation. “In the midst of telling stories from the past, we’re creating and capturing stories that we’ll talk about for generations to come,” she says.

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<sup>1</sup> Feiler, Bruce. *The Stories that Bind Us*. *The New York Times*, March 15, 2013

## CREATING AN EFFECTIVE FAMILY CULTURE

The Roy A. Hunt Foundation takes a proactive and thoughtful approach to maintaining an effective family culture, now and in the future. They listed good practices in an internal document titled *Notes on an Effective Family Culture*, aiming to prevent and mitigate family conflict before it happens.

Among the many ways family members aspire to interrelate, family members are careful not to force the rightness of their point of view. The document reads: “We handle power, authority, and agreements in the spirit of partnership, rather than having one person excise power over another. We realize that sometimes we may disappoint each other, and we strive to keep our agreements with each other.”

According to long-time family trustee Terry Hunt, who wrote the document, “Having these guidelines helps us manage conflict before it builds. We have a culture where we can talk through issues and agree to disagree. It’s not about blaming. It’s about giving people a positive sense of family and culture, and sharing the space in a respectful way.”

Often in family settings, Hunt says, no one knows where the lines are until someone says you’ve crossed them. “We aim to create a loving culture where we can correct and self-correct without shame. That’s the key ingredient to a healthy family.”

Read the full document *Notes on an Effective Family Culture* at NCFP’s Knowledge Center.

# Resolve family conflicts.

Conflict is normal in any relationship, family, or group setting, and family foundations are no different—particularly those that are growing and evolving. Conflict in itself is not good or bad: it’s how people acknowledge and manage conflicts that can make or break a foundation over time.

“When I work with families, I suggest that they have a formal process, in writing, for dealing with conflict. This might include how to handle difficult conversations, how to deal with a difficult or ineffective board member, and best practices for communication styles,” says Lisa Parker, president of the Lawrence Welk Foundation. “Conflict policies are often overlooked, yet they can be critical to the success of the foundation.”

Kerry Alys Robinson of the Raskob Foundation spoke of the conflicts within her family of 125+ members. “We have perennial tensions and challenges that we revisit on a regular basis. One of which is the tension between two seemingly competing goals: family unity and mission effectiveness,” she says.

“Half the family wants to make big dollar investments over time to a few star grantees; others, while they see the wisdom in biggest investments, would rather focus on smaller but deeper meaning grants.” While she called this a healthy tension in her foundation, “sometimes I wish the founders would have established that directive for us early on, rather than leaving us to argue it.”

“Family unity is best preserved by being other-centered. When we maintain an outward focus on our grantees, we have less division among family members. An inward focus—on us—almost always leads to dissatisfaction, compromise, and mediocrity.”

—Kerry Alys Robinson, Raskob Foundation  
for Catholic Activities



The more people that are involved in a family foundation, the greater risk there will be for competing claims and conflict, she says. “In our family, we tend to shy away from controversial funding areas where the family might be divided, however it does come up. For example, lately I’ve been involved with Catholic champions to abolish the death penalty. I would like to see the foundation fund this initiative, yet some of my family members do believe in capital punishment. I know it’s important to maintain family unity and steer clear of subjects that could divide the family. Yet it can be frustrating at times.”

To manage situations like these, the Raskob Foundation created a policy whereby every active member is given \$5K in discretionary grant money (board members are given \$7K), to which they can fund any Catholic charity in the world. Discretionary grantmaking bypasses the normal application process, and family members can pool their discretionary dollars with others, thereby increasing impact.

“One of the ways we overcome inevitable differences is to name the creative tensions that are

at play, to honor them, and create a culture where people are able to speak with candor and charity,” she says. “We have a great maxim in our family: ‘Everyone has a piece of wisdom.’ When things get heated, we remind ourselves that we trust each other. I trust my cousins. I believe in the sincerity of people’s viewpoints.”

Robinson says her foundation maintains family unity by staying outward focused—meaning, they keep the focus on grantees rather than the family. “When we become too inwardly focused, that’s when the bickering or breakdown happens. We start to see more personality conflicts. When we remain outwardly focused, those conflicts don’t happen.”

“We get into trouble when we spend an inordinate amount of time on ourselves, looking inward, focusing on the process and procedures and family dynamics,” she says. “To get out of that difficulty, we remember that we are brought together more tightly as a family when we put our grantees front and center. We try—through the instrument of the foundation—to minister to their needs. And that has worked almost every time.”



# The Last Word on Longevity: Stay humble. Do good work.

If perpetuity is the plan for your foundation, there's one more secret to know. Most veteran family foundations spoke of the importance of staying humble. When a spirit of humility pervades, family members tend to treat the work, their grantees—and each other—with greater care.

Humility creates a condition to come together and do the work at hand, says Kerry Alys Robinson of the Raskob Foundation. “I'm astonished at how humble my relatives are in the face of this privilege of being stewards. There has never been a sense that this is ours. It's humbling to do philanthropy well, to have humility in the face of our grantees.”

Maintaining an attitude of humility also helps with family unity, she says. “When we're reminded of the privilege and responsibility of stewardship, conflicts don't happen. Our grantmaking never fails to bind us.”

In a January 2018 webinar, Michael Meadows, former family trustee of The Meadows Foundation in Texas, concurred. “Early on, my father, who was CEO of the Foundation at that time, hammered into our heads that we were stewards of a public trust, and that it was a great privilege to have the opportunity to participate in the foundation's work. He also made

it clear that if we could not work together and serve the community well as fiduciaries of this public trust, then we would be replaced.” That reminder, he says, kept family members focused on the good work they were there to do.

What helps, too, is to view the family foundation as a learning organization.

According to Kelly Nowlin, fifth generation board member of the 100-year-old Surdna Foundation, “It sounds cliché, but when the board names itself a learning board, it automatically diffuses power dynamics in the field and around the table. It says: ‘we're here to learn, and we're here to do it with you.’”

Nowlin says one thing the Surdna Foundation board does well is to continually evaluate themselves and their work. “We've operated like an athlete or an artist—constantly self-evaluating, looking at our practice, refining as we go. We are doing that while we are in it, and I am certain it has helped our foundation persevere for more than 100 years,” says Nowlin.

“What I impress upon the next generation is that it's a gift and a privilege that the family gets to do this work,” says Nowlin. “We hold onto the gratitude and joy in it. Don't lose that.”

“It's a gift and privilege to do this work. We hold onto the gratitude and joy in it. Don't lose that.”

—Kelly Nowlin, Board Member, Surdna Foundation

Surdna extended family



## Resources to Learn More

Esposito, Ginny, ed. *Splendid Legacy 2: Creating and Re-creating Your Family Foundation*. National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2017

Esposito, Ginny. *Family Philanthropy Transitions: Possibilities, Problems and Potential*. National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2015.

Gast Fawcett, Elaine. *Avoiding Avoidance: Addressing and Managing Conflict in Family Philanthropy*. National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2015.

Gersick, Kelin, Stone, Deanne, Desjardins, Michelle, Grady, Katherine and Muson, Howard. *Generations of Giving: Transitions in Family Foundations*. National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2006.

*Transitions in Family Philanthropy*. National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2015.

## 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.

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## About the Author



**Elaine Gast Fawcett** of [PhilanthropyCommunications.com](http://PhilanthropyCommunications.com) is a philanthropy writer and communications consultant who has been telling people's stories since fifth grade. For nearly 20 years, she has worked to strengthen the philanthropic

sector sharing stories, tools, and practices that move family philanthropy forward. Elaine has interviewed 1000+ philanthropists, entrepreneurs and nonprofit leaders, and published a number of books, toolkits, articles and reports for foundations, nonprofits and grantmaker associations—including NCFP. Elaine lives in Northern California (Walnut Creek) with her husband and three young girls.

