

Stories for Engaged Learning

Blending and Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities Case study: Tinkering Family Fund

The decision to hire an Executive Director often comes at a time of transition in a family foundation – the donor’s retirement, the addition of next generation members or the influx of capital – when longtime relationships rather than process may set the course. Effective intra-board and board-staff relationships require shared decision-making that can run counter to a family’s established authority structure. In this session participants will explore ways of establishing relationships among family board members and staff that further both the foundation’s goals and each individual’s sense of satisfaction.

Through a case study and small group discussion, participants will delve into family dynamics. The Tinkering family’s experience will demonstrate the importance of transparency and creativity in:

- Planning for your Executive Director’s success
- Defining and re-shaping working relationships
- Engaging all board members in decisions
- Avoiding potential conflicts of loyalty

Stories for Engaged Learning is a collection of case studies rooted in the practical experiences of family and private foundations navigating the challenges of creative effective philanthropy. Designed specifically for facilitated sessions at conferences, board meetings, and retreats, the case studies captivate the imagination and fuel active participation.

GMA Foundations consultants employ these stories to deliver fast-paced, useful workshops for groups of varying size. Contact Mary Phillips mphillips@gmafoundations.com for additional session descriptions and facilitation options.



Case Study: Tinkering Family Fund

Effective Relationships

Background: Will Tinkering serves as President of the foundation established by his father in 1983. The Tinkering Fund is based in the college town of Asheville, North Carolina with offices adjacent to Will Tinkering's family office. The Fund's board consists of Will and his two daughters and son-in-law, who all live in Asheville, and Will's brother Rob and his three children, all of whom live in the Midwest. Executive Director, Karen Carlyle, was hired in 2018 to replace Maureen Richards, the prior long-time executive director and a close friend of Will's.

Maureen had been devoted to Will, to the consternation of the Midwest branch of the family, who believed that their ideas and needs were ignored. It was common knowledge, though unspoken among the staff, that Will was really calling the shots. Rob Tinkering II, head of the Midwest branch, was delighted at the change in leadership and looked forward to seeing some changes.

The Transition: Karen Carlyle came to the Tinkering Fund from her work as Vice President for Programs at a local community foundation. She began her new job excited by the opportunity to lead one of the largest foundations in North Carolina. After sitting through her first board meeting as an observer, Karen was disillusioned by what she saw. The majority of the foundation's grantmaking was presented to the board as a mission accomplished. Grants were approved by the executive director and board chair, then Will and Maureen, who reported to the board on grants awarded and outcomes achieved. Karen resolved to create a more engaging agenda for the board's next meeting.

Refer to the Tinkering family tree on next page.

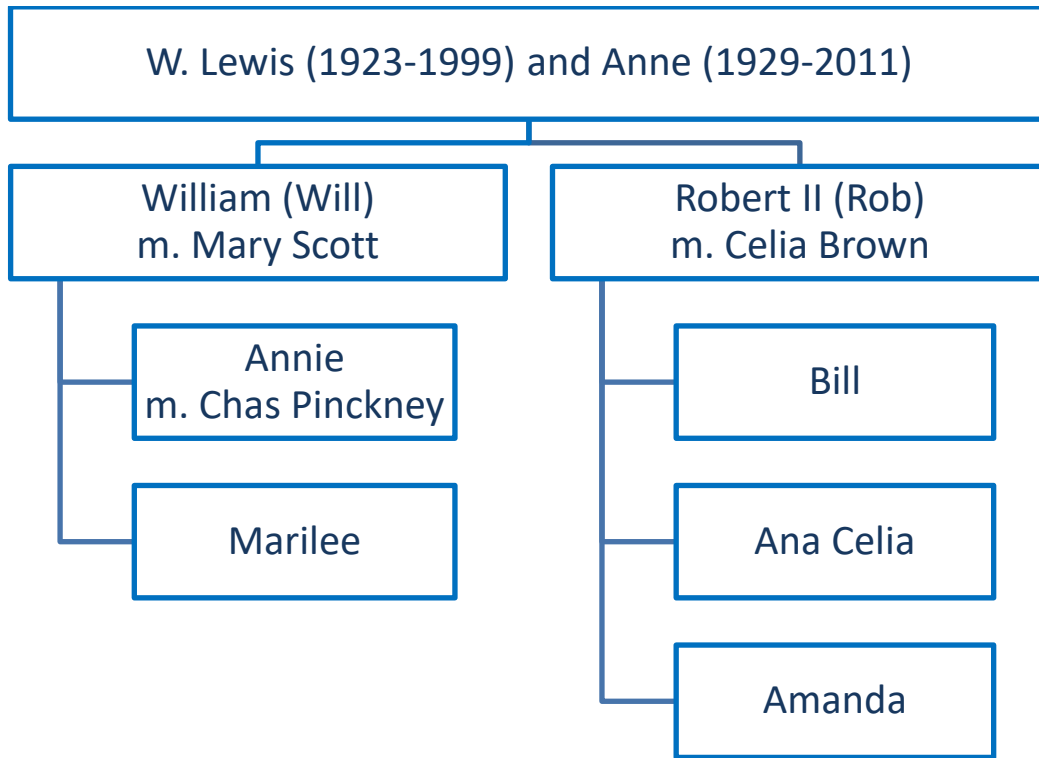
The Challenge: Shortly after she began her new job, Karen suggested to Will that the grant review process be restructured to better engage the board, especially its Midwest members. She envisioned organizing field trips so that all directors could experience the foundation's work firsthand. She suggested a discussion item for the next agenda to raise the idea of a board evaluation committee that would review the foundation's impact. It seemed to Karen that the foundation had been funding many of the same organizations year after year with very little due diligence

Will nixed Karen's ideas immediately. Since the foundation's major grants were local, he reasoned, it was up to him to monitor them and report to the board. He felt that board members were too busy for hours of grant reviews and travel for site visits, and that local board members better understood the needs in North Carolina as they served on many nonprofit boards. Will believed it was his job as board chair to make sure that grants went to the best organizations. Karen wondered whether Will was deliberately limiting board discussion of organizations that were important to him and his family.

Discussion

- A. What potential conflicts of interest exist in the way this foundation approaches its grantmaking? What should it do differently?
- B. Is Will's management of the foundation ethical? Why or why not?
- C. In what ways can Karen exercise her influence as Executive Director?

The Tinkering Family



Facilitated discussion

This case study is a tool for sparking deeper conversation among trustees, family, or peers in philanthropy when employed by an experienced facilitator as part of a *Stories for Engaged Learning* workshop.

You are free to use this case study for your own discussions as long as you give GMA Foundations appropriate, visible credit. We welcome your feedback after using this as a tool for family or board engagement.

Contact Mary Phillips at GMA Foundations, mphillips@gmafoundations.com to discuss the suitability of *Stories for Engaged Learning* workshops to your needs, additional case study topics, and GMA consultants' facilitation services.