



Death, Legacy, and Leadership Transition: Preparedness Quiz

How prepared is your family philanthropy for the death or illness of a donor or senior leader? While it may be impossible to be fully ready for the loss of any leader or loved one, there are steps you can take to plan ahead, making it much easier should a crisis occur.

Take this two-minute quiz to find out how prepared your family philanthropy is, and in what areas you might improve. For each question, assign a score from 0-5 based on where you think your family philanthropy falls: 0 being “never/not at all” and 5 being “always/all the time.”

1. The founder/leader willingly participates in planning what will follow his or her death, including leadership succession and any influx of assets, and engages in honest conversation about this with the adult children.
0 1 2 3 4 5
2. The founder/senior family member has a written or recorded donor intent/legacy statement that addresses their wishes for the philanthropy and family involvement, and shares this statement with the next generation and board.
0 1 2 3 4 5
3. There is a well-known plan and a clear process for leadership transition for the founder(s) and/or board chair, and possibly a named preselected successor. There is also a leadership transition plan in place for the CEO/staff executive, as applicable. The board and/or staff revisits these plans periodically to reaffirm or update them.
0 1 2 3 4 5
4. The family and/or foundation celebrates the legacy carried forth by the founders and senior family members, ideally while they are still living, as well as after their death.
0 1 2 3 4 5
5. There are bylaws addressing terms, rotation policies, and board member eligibility, retirement age, and removal.
0 1 2 3 4 5
6. There are solid investment and spending policies in place, and the board is prepared to manage an influx of assets, and staff appropriately, as applicable.
0 1 2 3 4 5
7. Board, family, and/or staff connect with others in the field for ongoing learning and peer support, and know where to go for resources or advice when needed.
0 1 2 3 4 5
8. The board and/or family engages outside advisors when needed to facilitate difficult conversations, navigate family dynamics, and guide the board through leadership transitions.
0 1 2 3 4 5
9. The board and/or family actively engages the next generation, offering them opportunities to formally participate in grant decisions, or some other form of participation in governance.
0 1 2 3 4 5
10. Next generation successors feel confident, clear, and prepared to step into a leadership role within the family philanthropy.
0 1 2 3 4 5

How Did You Score?

0-10: Denial. Your board, family, and/or senior leaders avoid conversations about legacy, death, or leadership transitions. Perhaps no one has brought it up, or someone is unwilling. Take heart: awareness is the first step toward change. Talk with your peers, read resources from the National Center for Family Philanthropy, and engage outside help if needed. Make a plan to broach the important conversations before it's too late.

11-20: Backburner. Your board, family, and/or staff knows they need to address a potential or pending change. Perhaps the topic has come up in meetings or side conversations, yet it keeps getting pushed to the backburner: "We know we need to address that, and will...someday." Instead of waiting for someday, schedule a date to hold those intentional conversations and plan ahead.

21-30: Starting to Plan. You've held conversations and have a few pieces in place, such as a donor intent statement and/or written board policies that address "what happens when..." changes. There is still more to do. Take inventory on what you know—and what you still need—to appropriately prepare for change.

31-40: Acceptance. Your board, family, and/or staff fully accepts and regularly plans for change that is imminent or expected. You may still need to consider and discuss what happens in the case of unexpected or sudden changes, and make a plan for those as well. Remember, the more you can plan in advance for "worse-case scenarios," the easier it will be for everyone if or when those scenarios occur.

41-50: Ready as can be. Great work! Your board and/or family members have openly discussed various scenarios, put policies and good practices in place, and have a well-known plan for potential change, crises, and succession. You celebrate the legacy of the founders and/or senior leaders, while supporting and ushering in a future of next generation leaders. You are as ready as you can be for any potential change that comes your way. Please share your experience and stories with NCFP and your family philanthropy peers to inform and encourage them.