



Pursuit of Excellence: Board Self-Assessment Service Frequently Asked Questions

What is Pursuit of Excellence (POE)?

POE is a board self-assessment process, the first designed specifically for family foundations, which identifies areas of strength as well as practices needing improvement, and also provides the resources to help a foundation develop a blueprint for improving its performance.

How can I use the POE process to strengthen my foundation's work and organization?

Foundations often require grantees to evaluate the effectiveness of their work, but seldom assess their own. POE is a self-diagnostic tool which helps board members identify their foundation's strengths and where improvements can be made. This will help ensure that foundation boards direct their limited resources with the greatest impact possible.

What does POE measure?

The POE questionnaire asks board members detailed questions that fall into the following categories:

- program development/grantmaking,
- legacy/vision/mission,
- governance,
- family roles, and
- finance/administration/accountability.

Questions are designed to elicit respondents' views both on existing practice and what the foundation aspires to.

How was POE tool developed?

The basis for the POE board self-diagnostic tool was seven years of in-depth research on 30 multi-generational family foundations. The resulting book, [*Generations of Giving: Leadership and Continuity in Family Foundations*](#), illuminated the core elements that help families pursue effectiveness in their foundations.

Can I use POE in my strategic planning process?

Yes. POE helps boards become more strategic and can be used to provide the context for creating a strategic plan. It can help a board reach greater clarity around the issues that need to be addressed in a plan, such as donor intent, the foundation's mission, its funding focus, or taking a more strategic approach to its grantmaking. It helps board members, and staff, if any, think more about the broader context of the foundation and how that context affects decisions about why they do this work and what they want to accomplish before answering the question of how.

What does the POE process involve?

NCFP is contacted, either by a foundation or a consultant with a foundation client, to start the process. If the foundation does not have a consultant who has been trained in the use of the tool, NCFP will provide referrals. **Arrangements concerning consultant fees, scope of work, etc. are to be negotiated solely between the consultant and the foundation.** Working with a consultant that you have identified yourself or that has been recommended by NCFP, your board members (and a lead staff person if you have one and

choose to include that perspective) will each complete the self-diagnostic questionnaire online. Your chosen consultant may also wish to ask you to provide additional information about your foundation, such as bylaws, policies, and mission statement. Typically, the results of the questionnaire will be shared by a consultant or facilitator at a meeting of the board, or during a retreat. The consultant will then help you devise an action plan based on those areas the board identifies as priorities for improvement.

What are the intended outcomes from our participation and the deliverables?

At the conclusion of the questionnaire process, you will be equipped to improve your foundation's performance. You will receive:

- 1.) A report of your questionnaire results with enough detail to provide a fuller picture of the spectrum of opinion on your board.
- 2.) A written report from the consultant with comments comparing the foundation's results with what is considered effective practice and recommendations on areas needing improvement.
- 3.) An action plan agreed on by the board addressing the priorities you've identified for further work.
- 4.) Ongoing access to NCFP's [Fundamentals of Family Philanthropy](#) monthly webinars and other NCFP resources and materials including our [Family Giving Lifecycle Series](#) and [Policy Central](#).

How long does the process take?

The online questionnaire has approximately 25-30 questions, depending on how you customize it. Times vary, but the typical respondent completes it in 15 to 20 minutes. In addition, some foundations contract with their individual consultant to conduct individual phone interviews with the foundation's board (and senior staff person if there is one). Foundations should allow board members adequate time to respond to the questionnaire, usually about two weeks. The questionnaire responses remain confidential; results are reported without attribution. Then the consultant needs time to evaluate the results and write a report. Therefore, if you schedule a meeting to hear from the consultant, you should expect that you will need at least a month from the time the questionnaire is made available to board members. The actual time will depend on your arrangements with the consultant.

What's the role of the board? Of the staff? Of the consultant?

- **Board members** are expected to take the questionnaire by the deadline and to participate in a meeting to hear the results and decide on a plan.
- **The senior staff** person, if any, will in most cases be the consultant's lead contact during the board self-diagnostic tool. Also, foundations have the option of inviting the senior staff person, as well as next gen family members, to participate in the questionnaire.
- **The consultant** should meet with the board to present the questionnaire results compiled by NCFP. The consultant will typically provide a written report with comments and make recommendations on areas needing improvement. The consultant will then help the board identify priorities and initial next steps. Following the meeting, the consultant should prepare a final report on what was agreed to at the meeting with regard to actions to be taken. At that point the formal board self-diagnostic tool process is complete but foundations may choose to contract with the consultant for further assistance with implementation.

What is NCFP's role?

NCFP administers the questionnaire and provides your chosen consultant with the results. NCFP also can talk with your chosen consultant about the use of the board self-diagnostic tool and is available to provide continued support and suggested materials as they work with foundations on the process.

Can I customize the POE to meet specific needs of my foundation?

Yes. The POE questionnaire is a research-based tool that is standard for all foundations that use it. By keeping a standard instrument, NCFP is able to compile all foundations' responses—without any identification—into a database of practice that will serve as an important source of research for foundations that want to compare themselves with others in the future. However, a limited number of customized questions can be added.

Can the online questionnaire be done via a paper version?

The questionnaire is conducted online through the online service, Survey Monkey. Both board and staff members have found it very easy to use. However, if your board has a member who is not able to take the questionnaire online, a paper version can be requested. This may slow the reporting time since the board members' responses must be hand-entered by NCFP staff.

Is there a cost for using the POE tool?

The POE survey and its results are offered as a complimentary benefit for current NCFP Members. The costs of additional analysis and planning with your chosen consultant is not included.

Foundations that are not current NCFP Members should contact NCFP at 202.293.3424 for current pricing.

How do we get started?

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The consultant will then initiate the assessment process by contacting our office, 202-293-3424 or emailing Jason Born at jason@ncfp.org.