



WEBINAR

**QUICK TIPS FROM
OUR EXPERTS**

Best Ways to Engage Family & Build Legacy

Family philanthropy is easy to picture as a solved problem—right up until the moment a new generation arrives, a family line grows or narrows, or someone has to decide what happens when the founders are gone. The families who navigate those moments well are usually the ones who defined what their legacy meant, built governance flexible enough to bend, and invited the next generation in with genuine room to lead.

Foundation Source's in-house team of philanthropic and legal specialists compiled their best tips on family engagement and legacy building, drawing on decades of guiding donors and advisors through these exact questions. **Here are seven key takeaways from the discussion.**

1 A Philanthropic Legacy Means Many Things— Start by Defining What It Means to You

A legacy isn't one fixed thing; it takes the shape of your values and your circumstances.

- It can be as grand as a lasting public mark, or as close to home as continuing a family tradition of giving across generations.
- It can mean preserving something of cultural, historical, or artistic significance for future generations—not to burnish a reputation, but to protect an important touchstone.

- For you it may mean mentoring the next generation, even beyond your own family, by passing down hard-won wisdom and experience.
- You don't have to wait. A legacy is often described as "planting seeds in a garden you never get to see," but there are meaningful ways to start yours right now.

2 Build Governance Broad Enough to Bend Across Generations

Over-prescribing your legacy can trap the very people meant to carry it; leave deliberate room to adapt.

- Define "family" thoughtfully—bloodline, spouses, extended family—and anticipate how an inclusive definition plays out as the family grows or contracts.
- Don't specify every detail. Build a structure broad enough to foresee the next generation or two, but open enough for them to decide when the time comes.
- Use flexible models: advisory committees or a junior board to bring members up through the ranks, and rotating seats so not everyone has to serve at once.
- Revisit your voting structure before the family grows exponentially—voting can get unwieldy fast.

3 Know Your Generational Audience

Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z approach giving differently—but share more than you might expect.

- Millennials gravitate toward social justice, the environment, and direct impact, often acting as activists rather than only donors.
- Gen Z treats philanthropy as a values-driven, digital-first movement, prioritizing transparency, measurable impact, and hands-on channels like volunteering and crowdfunding.
- Across every generation, the top motivator is passion for the cause, and the top three goals are the same: improve the community, help create a better world, and drive measurable impact.

4 Engage the Next Generation on Their Terms

Connecting with younger family members means meeting their interests where they are, not where you expect them to be.

- This generation is involved in philanthropy earlier, and 63% cite family as a primary motivator—so the foundation is a natural point of connection.
- Let go of what you think they “should” do. Their values are shaped by yours but will manifest in their own ways.
- The goal isn’t to pull them into your philanthropy but to engage them in a way that’s relevant to them.
- Philanthropy is “a room with many doors” and you can help each person find the one that fits.

5 Make the Invitation Genuine

The fastest way to lose the next generation is to invite their voice and then ignore it.

- Be honest about what you’re offering: joining the foundation as-is, or a real seat with room to influence policy and approach.
- Beware the “false consensus” trap—inviting people in only to have them discover the culture is to defer to the founder, which is a recipe for disengagement.
- Build on-ramps: a board buddy, learning opportunities, and patience from the inviting generation, since no one contributes fully at their first meeting.
- Consider a hybrid path—honoring the founder’s original intent while giving the next generation room to bring a fresh angle.

6 Put Structure Behind the Hard Conversations

Clear governance gives families the objectivity—and the permission—to disagree productively.

- Favor formal onboarding and explicit decision-making structures; they give newer members the authority to question and challenge.
- Bring in a neutral, outside facilitator for especially fraught topics, like when and how to involve in-laws.
- Build the muscle to agree to disagree and move on—and to feel okay about it.
- When new priorities surface, return to your north star: not “is this a bad organization?” but “does this advance our mission?”

7 Plan for Succession—including When Family Isn't Interested

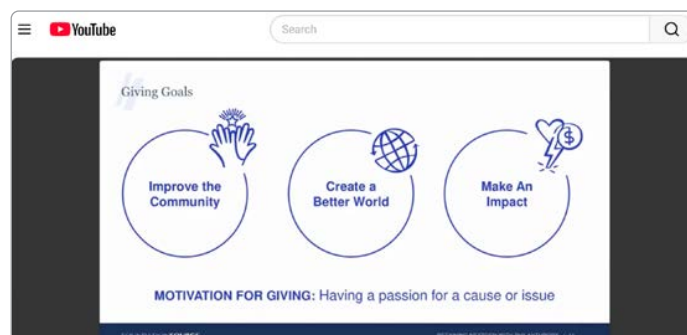
A range of good options exists when the next generation doesn't want to carry the work forward.

- Decide in advance whether you'd rather transition control to unrelated people who share your causes or wind the foundation down.
- Some founders entrust their advisors to spend down within a set period, with specific instructions on focus, grant size, and impact.
- Others give while living and deliberately sunset within their lifetime.
- Alternatives include a non-family board of subject-matter experts who share the founder's intent, or merging with a like-minded foundation—each requires careful, customized planning.

Family and legacy are rarely the thing a philanthropist thinks about on the busiest days—until a transition arrives and they become the only things that matter. The families who thrive across generations are the ones who defined their legacy early, built governance flexible enough to grow with them, and invited the next generation in with a real voice.

Across every family and every model, one lesson holds: a lasting legacy isn't about controlling the future—it's about preparing the people who will shape it.

To learn more about these key takeaways and other important insights, watch the full conversation [here](#).



HAVE A QUESTION?

Call 800.839.0054 or send us an email at info@foundationsource.com.

www.foundationsource.com

©2026 Foundation Source Philanthropic Services Inc.
All rights reserved. v0926

The information provided in this document is for general information purposes only, and does not constitute legal, tax or investment advice.

FOUNDATIONSOURCE
Your Partner in Giving