

Governance & Leadership

This area considers the composition and roles of the foundation's governance (board of directors, board of trustees, or steering committee) and leadership (executive director, chief executive officer, or top management team) and explores who sets mission, values, and goals and who is involved in strategic planning and decision-making.

Composition & membership

Who are the decision-makers?

Little or no participation:

- Governance body is composed of donors with power and prestige, often originating from dominant culture (e.g., White, male, cisgender) with no lived experience. At family foundations, this includes direct family members or descendants, or people with close relationships to original donors. Leadership has a similar background of power, wealth, and privilege.

Some participation:

- Governance body includes independent members, some with lived experience, but not in key roles. When people from non-dominant cultures join, they receive little support. Majority of governance body does not consider internal ways of working or dynamics. Leadership may have lived experience.

Substantial participation:

- Governance body is substantially composed of people with lived experience who occupy key roles, such as chair. People in governance and leadership with lived experience are welcomed and supported. Co-leadership, with one leader having lived experience, may be practiced.

Full participation:

- Governance body is conceptualized, structured, and led fully by people with lived experience. Structures are in place to ensure diverse representation at governance and leadership levels, with position holders regularly rotating over time to ensure power does not become entrenched and avoid restricting access to positions.

Input

Whose voice is being included?

Little or no participation:

- No input from people with lived experience is considered in governance discussions or in establishing foundation's mission, values, goals, and strategy.

Some participation:

- There may be an advisory body of people with lived experience, but it is more ceremonial or performative and does not have real power.

Substantial participation:

- A community advisory body is meaningfully engaged. Accountability mechanisms provide input from broader community.

Full participation:

- There is community-led governance and leadership that includes mechanisms for gaining wide-ranging and diverse input from staff, grantees, and broader community in all discussions.

Who has access to governance?

Little or no participation:

- Only leadership communicates with governance.

Some participation:

- Only leadership communicates between advisory body, governance, and staff.

Substantial participation:

- There is regular dialogue between governance, advisory body, leadership, and staff.

Full participation:

- Governance is widely available and accessible.

Decision-making

Who has the final say?

Little or no participation:

- Major decisions are made by governance, through majority vote, with no consideration for equity, power, or privilege.

Some participation:

- Critical decisions are made by governance and majority vote; other decisions are delegated to leadership.

Substantial participation:

- Governance and leadership, which are substantially people with lived experience, regularly consider community input and work with staff to make critical decisions.

Full participation:

- A diverse and rotating group of community members in governance share major decision-making with leadership, staff, and broader community through participatory processes and consensus. There's a strong focus on equity, including how to give more gravity to voices of those who are most impacted, are not present, or have least power.

Why did you select the statements you did?

Additional questions to consider:

- Who is not at the table?
- Which parts of the community the foundation serves are not reflected in governance and leadership?

Resources:

- [7 Responsibilities of a Trust-Based Board](#), by Trust-Based Philanthropy Project
- [Mosaics & Mirrors: Insights & Practices in Feminist Co-Leadership](#), by Ruby Johnson and Devi Leiper O'Malley
- [Fenomenal Shared Governance Model](#), by Fenomenal Funds
- [10 Things We've Learned About Community-Led Philanthropy](#), by Global Giving