

A Family Discussion Guide

for Giving





Yes, we did it. We invented our own word to describe what we mean by Family Philanthropy. However you define family – from fur-babies to grandkids to the families we choose – the desire to make our world a better place and leave a lasting impact inspires us all. No matter where you are in your journey as a philanthropist – even if it is only a dream right now - we invite you to use this discussion guide to learn how philanthropy has evolved and what that means for you and the people, places and things you love.

Whether you're just beginning your family's philanthropic journey or you're a seasoned pro, the key to happy family giving is conversation. Family dialogue begins with personal reflection, a facilitated workshop or a dedicated family task force. We hope you find this family discussion guide helpful in your journey.

“Giving locally enables family members to become more engaged, with better opportunities to ask and listen to what is needed.”

- Bruce Deboskey
On Philanthropy: Eight steps for effective family giving – The Denver Post.



Ghazal Vaghedi

Vice President of Business Development and Community Engagement
720.898.5921
GVaghedi@CommunityFirstFoundation.org



Rebecca Olchawa Barker

Director of Donor Services
720.898.5933
RBarker@CommunityFirstFoundation.org

Motivations Matter

Every family has a set of values unique to them. And, every member of a family has values unique to them as individuals. How, then, can a family with varying values come together to find consensus in their approach to giving? Understanding your family values, and what the individuals within your family value most, gives you insight into their motivations. This is the first step in your family's planning for your philanthropic journey.

Begin by asking yourselves, "What difference do we want to make in our community? What difference do we want to make for ourselves?"

Identifying a common purpose can help determine many components of your family giving plan, including strategy, governance and operations. But more importantly, a common purpose and shared values can help you create a vision statement to direct your giving and help you achieve the impact you desire.

In the end, motivation is what inspires us to give. Giving is a conscious and deliberate choice you make in how you want to use your resources to make good possible.

Shared Purpose

Identifying a shared purpose begins by understanding your values. These core principles underlie your actions and decisions, and they give meaning to our lives. Values may span religious, ethical, political or educational beliefs, but they can help families discover a common purpose and direction. Having a clear understanding of your values will help you focus on causes and organizations that align with your mission.

Yet values aren't necessarily top-of-mind for people thinking about philanthropy. Too often, an enthusiastic donor or family jumps to: "Where (or to whom) do we give?"

Values aren't about giving to the homeless or the library or your alma mater; they are the underlying virtues that lead you to those decisions. When we align with our values, we feel connected to the world around us, as if we are living life with purpose. Values inform decisions; they strengthen us as families and communities, and they often form the basis of the legacy we leave.

Ideally you and your family members share a common bond based on values, but it's not always that easy. Values may differ among generations and/or family branches, and in some cases, these differences can cause conflict and strife. The trick is to stay committed to the process until you uncover the deep-seated values that hold your family together, regardless of age, personalities or varying interests.

It helps to articulate your values as a family, and in fact, it's best practice to do so as your first step in philanthropic planning. Talking about values, and even putting them to paper, will illuminate your family's identity and culture.

Maybe your family most values inclusiveness, social justice, freedom...or respect for elders, loyalty, faith...or creativity, self-expression, individuality. Just as every person is different, so too is every family and it's a learning experience to discover the distinct blend of values that your family holds dear.

Tips for Family Giving

Talk (and listen)!

Give where you live.

View giving as a partnership.

Involve everyone.

Have fun!

Talk (and listen)!

Have a family conversation about values. Gather the family for a discussion about personal and family values. It may not be your everyday dinner conversation, but with these discussion prompts, you'll be taking your first steps toward creating a family giving plan. Remember, just as your family evolves over time, so too will your philanthropic journey.

Give where you live.

Consider giving where you live to create local and visual impact. Explore the work nonprofits are doing in your community. As you begin your philanthropic journey, it can be impactful to see and experience the power of giving as impacts are felt closer to home.

Giving is a partnership.

View your giving as partnership. Whether you're partnering with a spouse or partner, with friends or family, or simply with the nonprofit you're supporting, your efforts ignite change. You're building a powerful connection and lasting relationship with others. Community First

Foundation is uniquely positioned to partner with you to connect you with local nonprofits by taking the guesswork out of giving. Using its [ColoradoGives.org](https://coloradogives.org) online giving tool, Community First Foundation vets nearly 3,000 Colorado nonprofits to ensure they are in good standing. You can search the site by location, cause or other keywords to learn more about the nonprofits that align with your interest. Then, make a donation to one or more nonprofits, or you can choose to support the causes and organizations you care most about with safe online giving or [dedicated fundraising pages](#). Your giving can take many forms and we welcome a conversation to see how we can help.

Involve everyone.

Why limit decisions about who to support to just the adults in the room? Instead, involve the entire family. Grandparents, teenagers and children each have passions underlying their values. Use the discussion questions in this guide to initiate conversation. You can also check out [Kids for ColoradoGives](#) to explore philanthropy in a kid-friendly manner. Download a free [Giving Activity Kit](#) or take an [online quiz](#) to help kids discover what kind of giver they are or want to be.

Have fun.

Giving should be fun. Recognize your personal and family motivations and values change, and revisit them over time. Just as your family evolves, your motivations and desires likewise evolve throughout a lifetime. The important thing to remember is family giving is as much about the journey as it is the giving.

10 Conversation Starters

1. What does the word "values" mean to you as an individual? What does it mean to your family?
2. Who in your family inspires you and why?
3. What is one of the most difficult decisions you've ever made? How did you make that decision and what guided you?
4. How do your values influence your approach to decision making?
5. How do your values show in your behavior and actions?
6. When you think about community, what problems or issues do you want to change?
7. If money was no concern, what causes do you wish you could support?
8. What is the purpose of our wealth?
9. What motivates you to want to give and be philanthropic?
10. How do you/we want to be remembered?



Motivations for Family Giving

Relational Giving

Relationships are key to community and they often influence a donor's approach to giving. Choosing to support a cause or organization may begin with a friend's recommendation or a family member's request.

Opportunity Giving

The word opportunity is defined as a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something. Often, opportunistic giving comes in the form of responding to immediate or emergency needs. This might be supporting a cause after a disaster or to help address an immediate concern.

Legacy Giving

For many families, philanthropy provides a way to build a family legacy, based upon common values, and to continue giving for future generations.

Community Giving

Community means different things to different people, but in general, it means a group of people who share common characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, goals or values. Community is often the driving force behind social change, or giving to support an issue that holds special meaning for them.

Altruistic Giving

Families who have earned success or been blessed with good fortune may simply wish to pay it forward through their giving.

Impact Giving

The desire to support social change is often a big motivator for giving. This type of intentional philanthropy leverages the power of philanthropic capital to close gaps or ignite innovation.

Six Questions Every Family with Philanthropic Interests Should Ask

While these questions may seem more pertinent to families pursuing a formal structure of giving, perhaps even a family foundation, the content and questions are important to any family seeking to do something collectively, including a Donor-Advised Fund. These can be addressed through personal reflection, a facilitated family workshop, or a dedicated family task force. *Reprinted with permission from [National Center for Family Philanthropy and Lansberg Gersick and Associates](#).*

1. Why should we give as a family?

Entrepreneurial families have many different reasons to give. Some are highly motivated by traditions and values: “Giving back to the community was something that my parents felt strongly about and was evident in their support of local organizations in our hometown.” Others follow the example of friends and other business families: “We got involved in philanthropy and set up a foundation due to the direct experience of the charitable activities of a close friend and colleague.” Still others have strong feelings of gratitude about their entrepreneurial success and want to create a vehicle for giving back: “We need to share our success with our employees, clients and community; their work and their loyalty to us have been an important part of our success.” Families may be driven by the economic benefits of these activities for brand and talent management or prioritize the long-term value created by a sustainable and resilient supply chain.

Whatever the reason, it is important to begin the strategic journey by asking your family members about their motivations for giving and seek alignment within the distribution of perspectives and opinions.

2. Should we give collectively or individually?

Personal values, family history, entrepreneurial legacy, size, and geographic dispersion shape our preferences and perspectives about the benefit of coordinated charitable activities in powerful ways. Giving individually allows for autonomy of decision-making, which is a particularly powerful motivator in transitions from a strong founding owner to a second-generation sibling partnership. Making philanthropy a family project can unleash the potential for pooled resources (both financial and human) to support a common purpose and can also provide an opportunity for a community of family members – many of whom may not work in the family business – to unite behind an ambitious common project that creates value for the family and for the world. As one family shared: “My cousins and I each believe deeply in giving back, but we know we cannot move the needle on big issues alone. If we want to scale our impact we need to join forces in areas of common interest.”

Shared philanthropy isn’t just an aggregation of individual philanthropic aspirations and activities. The whole has the potential to be greater than the sum of its parts, and many families take advantage of their scale to affect meaningful, lasting social change. Since the decision to give collectively or individually will have profound legal and organizational implications, families should resist the temptation to dive into grantmaking until the benefits and risks of each approach have been sufficiently explored.

3. What kind of impact do we expect?

There are countless ways that families can contribute meaningfully to the communities in which they live and operate. Paradoxically, the scale and scope of felt needs in modern society often encourage families to spread their limited resources too thinly across the grantmaking spectrum to have any meaningful impact. In other cases, families can become paralyzed by the diversity of choice: “It’s so easy to be distracted by all the non-profits doing great work in the world! That’s why it’s so critical to clearly define and maintain our philanthropic focus. This helps our staff identify potential grantees more effectively, say no to mismatched grant requests more transparently, and focus resources to maximize impact.”

Experience with successful philanthropists suggests that it requires time, education and vigorous debate to define a philanthropic mission and vision that is meaningful to the family and will have a material social impact. As another family expressed it: “our foundation did not begin with a ‘grand vision’...finding its purpose has been a process of debate and development.”

Whatever mission your family chooses to unite its philanthropic activities, be sure to discuss how success will be measured – in lives saved, students graduated, startups funded, and so forth. This will not only help to keep grantees and staff accountable, but also increases the likelihood that your programmatic success can be replicated elsewhere.

4. Should our philanthropic efforts be led by the family, the business, or both?

Many families engage in a range of charitable activities across their enterprise – from corporate social responsibility programs managed by marketing teams, to the purchase of tables by executives at local social events, to the sponsorship of local non-profits by a family foundation, and to social investments made by the Family Office.

Enterprising families need to ask themselves under what circumstances it makes sense for them to integrate their charitable efforts between their businesses, their foundation or donor-advised funds, and their individual discretionary giving. In some cases, coordination can amplify the impact the family wants to have in the world. For other systems, it can limit the breadth of philanthropic activity or the responsiveness of the system to changing needs within the community based on rigid requirements for program alignment.

5. What governance architecture do we need?

Based on the answers to the previous questions, and in accordance with legal and tax requirements, enterprising families must design and launch the governance forums and processes that will allow them to efficiently govern and lead their philanthropic projects. For example, in complex family enterprises, we encourage the creation of a Philanthropy Committee either at the Family Council or at the Board level, to coordinate the various initiatives being pursued throughout the enterprise.

That said, even the best laid philanthropic plans can run aground if the various governance bodies aren't staffed responsibly. Some families misguidedly use their foundations as a holding tank for family members who can't build a successful career within the operating business or find meaningful employment outside the family enterprise. Choosing your Trustees, Directors, and Investment Committee members wisely is critical for achieving maximum impact. As one family expressed it: "Balancing family engagement is critical. When family members are fully engaged, they can be catalytic within their Foundations, using their influence among staff and within the community to advance our social mission. However, not all family members get involved for the right reasons, and this has introduced complicated family dynamics around grant-making and staffing. We often ask ourselves what we are missing by not having more outside voices at the table?"

6. What risks might we face?

Despite their best intentions, we strongly recommend that enterprising families educate themselves on the potential risks they face when pursuing meaningful social impact, and establish a culture of risk management within their governance bodies. As one family put it: "Just because you don't have a profit motive, doesn't mean you aren't susceptible to risk!"

In our work, we have seen several situations that call for a greater attention to risk. For example, systems may be exposed to reputational risk if there is a misalignment in values between a family's corporate activities and their philanthropic work – like pairing investments in tobacco cultivation with the sponsorship of a lung cancer wing at the local hospital. For the owning family, there may be an additional reputational risk if philanthropic resources are used improperly – for instance on excessive compensation or flashy office space for family executives. Family foundations also need to be attentive to compliance requirements – particularly around giving and investments – or they risk running afoul of regulators and tax authorities.

Collective philanthropy, much like collective entrepreneurship, requires talented leadership and responsible governance. Therefore, it is important not to be tempted to appoint a family member with the wrong skills and competencies to a governance or leadership role. Finally, there is a very real risk that the family doesn't achieve the goal or impact that it desires with a given level of philanthropic investment. Managing this risk entails having the correct operational plan in place to support implementation, a proper evaluation process of the philanthropic project impact, and the willingness to accept and learn from failure.

Ready to embark on your family's philanthropic journey?

To achieve the extraordinary, we need people, organizations and resources that are activated to create real and lasting change. We need partners with a bias towards creative, community-driven solutions who are not afraid to innovate and try new things.

We invite you to join us in our work. We love meeting new people and hearing about new ideas. Let's dream big and make good possible!



   [Connect](#)
[@CommunityFirstFoundation](#)

5855 Wadsworth Bypass, Unit A | Arvada, CO 80003
[720.898.5900](tel:720.898.5900) | Philanthropy@CommunityFirstFoundation.org

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