



Pursuit of Excellence Frequently Asked Questions

1. 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 helps board members see where their practices could be improved for greater effectiveness in fulfilling their mission. Tough economic times make this especially urgent. Foundations need to insure that their limited resources have the greatest impact possible. POE is an assessment process, the first designed specifically for family foundations, which identifies areas needing improvement, and provides the resources to help a foundation develop a blueprint for action.

2. What does POE measure?

The POE survey assessment tool poses 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.

3. Can I use POE in my strategic planning process?

Yes. POE helps boards become more strategic and could be used as a first step to development of a strategic plan. It can help a board: reach greater clarity around donor intent, refine the foundation's mission, re-define its grantmaking focus, and take a more strategic approach to its grantmaking. It helps board members think more about *why* they do this work before they answer questions about *how* to do it.

4. What does the POE process involve?

Working with a consultant trained by NCFP, your board members (and a lead staff person if you have one) will each complete the assessment tool online. The consultant also will gather additional information about your foundation. At a retreat or other meeting of the board, the consultant will provide a detailed analysis of your results and

assess where you rank in relation to what is considered best practice. The consultant will then help you devise an action plan based on those areas the board identifies as priorities for improvement.

5. How long does it take?

The online survey has 64 questions. Times vary, but some board members have completed it in 20-25 minutes. In addition, some foundations contract with the consultant to conduct individual phone interviews with the foundation's board (and senior staff person if there is one.) Foundations should allow board members approximately two weeks to respond to the survey. Then the consultant needs time to evaluate the results and write a report. 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 survey is made available to board members. The actual time will depend on your arrangements with the consultant.

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

Board members are expected to take the survey by the deadline and to participate in a meeting to hear the results and decide on a plan. Foundations have the option of inviting the senior staff person to participate in the survey as well. In that event, NCFP will provide the consultant with a breakout of the board versus the staff responses, but the consultant will keep the staff person's responses confidential.

The consultant will meet with the board to provide the survey results, generated by NCFP. The results will include responses to each question but with no identifying data. The consultant also will provide a written report with comments comparing the foundation's ranking with what is considered effective practice and make recommendations on areas needing improvement. The consultant will then help the board develop a plan to improve areas identified as priorities. Following the meeting, the consultant will prepare a final report on what was agreed to at the meeting with regard to actions to be taken. Foundations may choose to contract with the consultant for further assistance with follow-up.

7. Can the online survey be done via a paper version?

The survey is generally done online through a tool called Survey Monkey. Trustees have found it very easy to use. However, if your board has a member who is not able to take the survey online, a paper version can be requested. Note that this can slow down the reporting time since the board members' responses must be entered by hand by NCFP.

8. What is NCFP's role?

NCFP administers the survey and provides the consultant with the results. For ongoing support, NCFP also provides the foundation with one year of access to the Family Philanthropy Online Knowledge Center containing more than 1,000 resources plus monthly teleconferences with experts and peers, and archives (audio and transcripts) of all past teleconferences.

9. Is the information gathered via POE kept confidential?

Yes, all survey information is kept confidential by NCFP and the consultants.

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

No. The POE survey 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 into a database of practice that will serve as an important source of research for foundations that want to compare themselves with others.

11. What are the outcomes from our participation? (i.e., what information is generated, what learning, what are the deliverables)

At the conclusion of the assessment process, the foundation will have 1.) survey results showing where there are points of agreement and disagreement; 2) consultant recommendations for areas needing improvement; 3) a plan agreed on by the board prioritizing the work to be done and steps to implement; 4) one year of access to NCFP's database and teleconferences providing resources to help the foundation work on the areas in its action plan.

12. Can we benchmark our foundation to other family foundations?

Yes. As part of the consultant's report, you will receive benchmarking information from NCFP's 2008 Family Foundation Practice Survey. This first ever random survey of family foundation practice helps you see where you fall compared with the current practices of other family foundations across the country.

13. Who else has used POE? What's been their experience?

During the pilot phase of the POE, half a dozen foundations, both small and large, used the survey tool. The tool was officially launched early in 2009. Here is a comment from one of the foundations that completed the assessment:

“Our Board of Directors took the Pursuit of Excellence survey as part of our board retreat this year. Pursuit of Excellence was the best tool our board has ever utilized to measure our strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the governance of our family foundation. The survey was thorough, thought provoking, and yet very manageable. The results helped our board launch into a dynamic and productive conversation about board governance.”

Noa Stryk, Trustee, McKnight Foundation

14. What does POE cost?

NCFP charges \$2,500 for use of the tool and the report of results. This includes a one-year subscription to the Family Philanthropy Online Knowledge Center, the largest resource for giving families. Foundations that are donors to NCFP and Friends of the Family receive a discounted price of \$2,000. Consultant fees vary and are negotiated between the foundation and the consultant.

15. Our foundation already has a consultant. Can that person conduct the assessment?

Only consultants trained by NCFP can administer the POE assessment process. Currently, there are 20 family foundation consultants around the country who are qualified. The goal of this policy is to maintain consistency and quality in the administration of the process. It may be possible for you to hire a POE-trained consultant who is willing to involve your current consultant in the process.

16. How do I get started?

Contact Susan Price at NCFP, susan@ncfp.org, 202-293-3424. She will provide a list of qualified consultants and help you begin the process.