

Overview

Introduction	1
1. Independence.....	2
2. Reflection of Community	2
3. Experience and Knowledge	2
4. Stewardship	3
5. Accountability	3
6. Commitment.....	3
7. Vision	4

Introduction

There are significant differences in the way community foundations are structured worldwide. However, underlying these differences are common elements that are universally viewed as key features of good governance.

We have generated a series of questions with a number of supporting examples to stimulate thought and discussion. Each community foundation should relate these key features to the context in which they operate.

You will find a list of terms with variable meanings from country to country in our **Glossary of Governance Terms** (on the TCFN website). For more comprehensive information about specific national models, please refer to the country reports (on the TCFN website).

Please note that this section is work in progress. Specifically, we will continue to add sample documents, case studies and other resource material to the questions put forward on the following pages.

Please feel free to send any suggestions and comments to [Donnell Mersereau](mailto:Donnell.Mersereau@tcfn.org).

A book that we found particularly inspiring when thinking about strong and effective Boards is:

[National Center for Nonprofit Boards](#) (ed.): 'Self-Assessment for Foundation Boards. Questionnaire for Trustees by Joshua Mintz, Denise Cavanaugh and Jane Pierson. April, 2000.

The book is available at

NCNB, 1828 L Street, NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20036-5104,
Tel.: ++1/ 202-452-6262, Fax: ++1/ 202-452-6299, email:mail@boardsource.org

1. Independence

- How do you ensure that you are at arms' length from government, [other institutions](#) and/ or single donors?
- Does the selection process of the Board ensure/ promote independence?
- Does the board operate free of conflict of interest and self dealing?

How do you ensure that you are at arms' length from government, other institutions and/ or single donors?

To be reflective of the community, many community foundations must take other institutions, such as the Church, into account. Italy illustrates this need, insofar as the Catholic Church plays a very important role in society.

The paper below examines the situation in Italy in regard to community foundations and their working relationship with the Church.

Luis Amorim: [Italian Community Foundations vis-a-vis the Catholic Church](#)

2. Reflection of Community

- Does the nomination process permit diverse composition?
- Do the trustees/ board members bring different perspectives to the board; safeguarding the interests of the foundation, the donors, and the public good rather than any one interest group?
- Does your committee structure allow you to have a broader reach into the community?

3. Experience and Knowledge

- Does the board contain a sufficient range of expertise and experience to make it an effective governing body?
- Does the board have an effective process to identify and recruit potential new trustees who offer the skills, knowledge or other characteristics needed to strengthen board composition?

4. Stewardship

- Does the board ensure the practices of the organization fulfill its mission?
- Do the trustees know and understand the purpose of the foundation as established by the charter or bylaws?
- Does the board take a responsible attitude to risk in investment, grant making, program management and other administrative matters.
- Does the foundation have measures that ensure donor intent is fulfilled?
- Has the board enunciated its values and ensured that they permeate all the foundation's activities (e.g. treatment of all people with fairness, dignity and respect)?

5. Accountability

- Are there audited financial statements?
- Does your foundation publish an annual report?
- Does the governing body ensure that the community foundation meets all laws and legal requirements?
- Are the dealings of the community foundation transparent to the public?

6. Commitment

- Does the foundation have a board job description stating responsibilities and tasks of its members such as minimum participation in meetings, committee membership and representation within the community?
- Is there a mechanism for board self evaluation and improvement ?
- Is the board sufficiently committed to find the adequate human and financial resources to allow the foundation to fulfill its mission?

7. Vision

- Does the community foundation respond to changing needs and opportunities?
- Is the mission regularly reviewed and revised to ensure it remains relevant to the challenges facing the community?
- Does the community foundation have procedures in place to respond to change?
- Is there a strategic plan and does the foundation follow it?
- Does the community foundation identify opportunities for community action?