



**NATIONAL CENTER FOR
FAMILY PHILANTHROPY**

Generational Sketches

There are many very different pictures of the senior generation in family foundations today. One is of the vibrant 70-year-old who is still deeply connected in the community. This senior grantmaker is wise, experienced and adds significantly to the work of the foundation. He respects and mentors the next generation. The next generation values his advice and encourages him to stay on the board.

The second picture is of a 70-year-old who has become cranky and difficult. This senior resents any change. He doesn't think the next generation is very capable so won't let go of leadership. Everyone wishes he would retire.

Both of these 70-year-olds are present in the family foundation world, and sometimes in the same family (and occasionally even in the same person).

There are also many different pictures of the next generation, which is often actually the middle generation, not the youngest one.

The first picture of the next generation is of a 50-year-old daughter who has been personally involved in philanthropy much of her life, has served on the foundation board for years, and would like to see the foundation move in new directions, while respecting its heritage. She is ready to take on leadership.

The second picture is the 40-year-old daughter who doesn't know a lot about philanthropy but who would very much like to be connected socially by giving foundation money to big events in her community.

What's most clear in these sketches is that like many issues in family philanthropy, there's no "one size fits all", either in describing or working through the dilemmas they raise. They do reflect, however, familiar patterns.

One recurring reality, for example, is that the 70-year-old who is deeply connected to the community would often be the first to suggest that the next generation assume leadership. He has suggested retiring but has been encouraged to stay. The involved next generation person who is ready for leadership has such a deep respect for the role of the senior generation that she will often wait... maybe too patiently... until other philanthropic opportunities draw her attention and leadership.