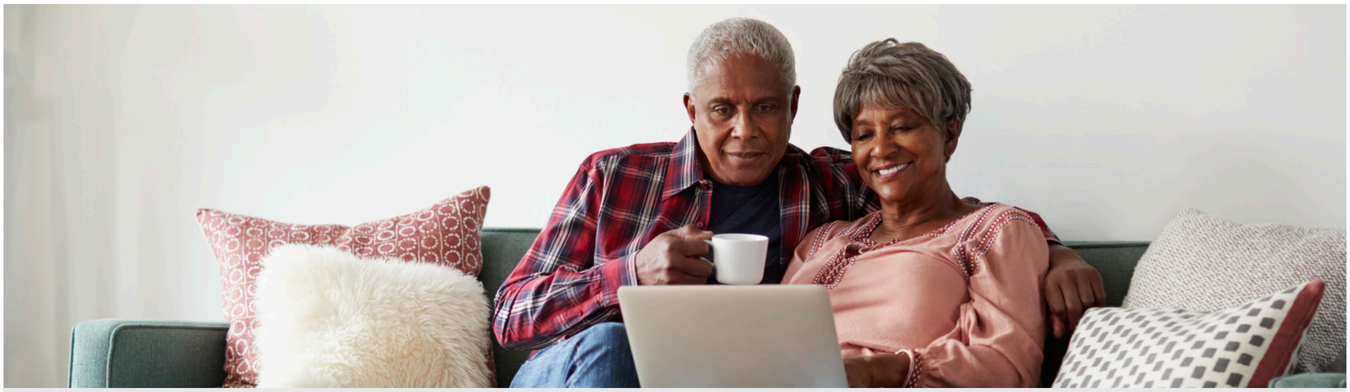
FACILITATOR GUIDE

Family meetings



The purpose of a family meeting is to foster open communication, collaborative decision-making, and mutually understood expectations. It should also provide a space to identify and candidly examine any issues that may have been unrecognized or avoided in the past. Regardless of the subject matter, meetings should be highly participative and inclusive of all family members.

This document provides general guidelines that you can choose from and adapt to the needs of each family. It also provides exercises that may be helpful if a family has difficulty collaborating on a particular topic.

Work with your client to prepare

First, discuss with your client everything that will be covered in the meeting and address any concerns.

Potential topics for a premeeting discussion:

- The need for separate meetings in cases such as divorce/remarriage.
- The extent of the heirs' knowledge about family wealth.
- Potential points of conflict.
- Ground rules to establish at the meeting:
  - **Inclusiveness.** Everyone's opinion counts.
  - **Respect.** Any sticking points can be tabled until the next meeting.
  - **Honesty/transparency.** Say what you really think. Silence is interpreted as agreement.
  - **Client-specific rules.** For example, your client may have a son who won't put down his cell phone or a daughter who tends to interrupt when others are speaking.

Next, work with your client to draft an agenda by helping to choose topics from the list below. Plan for a 60- to 90-minute meeting, depending on family size. Once the agenda is established, be sure that all attendees receive a copy in advance.

Potential agenda items:

- Defining wealth and inheritance parameters (approximately 15 minutes).
- Assigning family roles and responsibilities (approximately 20 minutes).
- Identifying need for heir education (approximately 15 minutes).
- Discussing shared philanthropy (approximately 20 minutes).
- Documenting a brief family history (approximately 20 minutes).
- Crafting a family mission statement (approximately 20 to 30 minutes).

The following section will explore each of these in detail.

Act as a guide throughout the meeting

Wealth and inheritance

Families who have yet to share the full extent of their wealth or the exact terms of an inheritance may find it useful to broach the subject here. You can also use this time as an opportunity to help heirs view their inheritance as money that's being invested in them, rather than simply given to them. Families may also want to begin a dialogue about what they see as the real meaning of wealth, for example, contrasting material possessions with the value of enduring principles or achievements.

EXERCISES

> "What are your personal concerns about wealth?"

Parent:
My children will have to work harder than I did to develop a sense of character and accomplishment.

Heir:
My peers will feel I don't deserve my wealth, that I haven't earned it.

> "If there were a fire in your home and you could save only one item, what would it be?"

> "One hundred years from now, if your family is remembered for only one thing, what would you want it to be?"

Family roles

These can be formal or informal responsibilities. Encourage families to acknowledge different interests and talents and be sure that each role is assumed willingly, without pressure from other family members.

Options include:

- Estate executor.
- Family business roles (shareholder, manager, accountant).
- Personal finance manager/consultant.
- Philanthropic educator/administrator.
- Investment manager.
- Family historian.
- Governance coordinator.
- Family-bonding coordinator (vacations, reunions, celebrations).

MEETING ROLES:

Families may also want to assign meeting roles, such as secretary or timekeeper, especially for younger family members.

Heir education

Determine any gaps in the heirs' knowledge regarding topics such as finance or investing basics, life-stage finance (college, marriage, refinancing), or management skills or abilities needed for a particular family role. Help families determine a course of action to supplement heir knowledge, as appropriate.

Shared philanthropy

Discussions about family philanthropy can actually serve as a helpful exercise in group decision-making, since the topic tends to provoke fewer personal conflicts. This is also a good opportunity to discuss family values and legacy.

EXERCISES

- Have heirs research a charity and develop a persuasive argument for involvement, which they'll bring back to the group at a later time.
- Discuss the differences between giving time and giving money—for both the charity and the volunteer/donor.

Family history

The mission statement worksheet will guide families through a high-level history. This activity is designed to promote family unity, enliven shared memories, and identify traditions and values to carry into future generations.

EXERCISES

- Create a family tree collectively in the meeting.
- Read aloud a history already created by a family member. Ask others to add further details.
- Ask each member to share a memory and collectively create an oral history on video.

Family mission statement

Your meeting should include some form of a family mission statement—sometimes called a statement of wealth purpose, family financial code, or family business plan. This document should be highly adaptable to the needs and preferences of each family. It can be as brief as a sentence or two or as long as a few pages.

The mission statement worksheet will guide families t hrough this step as they identify core values, collective goals, and personal attributes they consider most important.

EXERCISES

- Ask each family member to draft his or her personal mission statement, then share it with the group. Identify commonalities and use those as a springboard for drafting the family statement.
- "A portrait of our family in 20 years …." Write one or two paragraphs, including relationships, collective and individual achievements, and enduring values.

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Date of Publication: November 2020

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