

Case study

The Eva Ahlström Foundation

In conversation with Maria Ahlström-Bondestam

"Together, create something new from existing family values or history."

- **Name:** Maria Ahlström-Bondestam, Co-Founder and Chair of the Eva Ahlström Foundation
- **Country of origin:** Finland
- **Family size (total number of family members):** 420 family members (including in-laws) over seven generations
- **Background information about your family's legacy and current business activities:** My great-great-grandfather Antti Ahlström started our family business in 1851 in timber trading, sawmill operations and shipping. Today our portfolio companies operate in 29 countries with 15,500 employees and annual net sales EUR 5 billion. Our roots can still be seen in our biggest public listed portfolio company Ahlstrom-

Munksjö which provides innovative and sustainable fiber solutions. We also operations in industrial technology, real estate and forest.

- **Which generation are you part of?** 5th generation
- **Number of family members involved in your philanthropic activities:** 25 women in the 5th generation co-founded the Eva Ahlström Foundation in 2010. The foundation today has several satellites as well as an international chapter based in Geneva. Approx. 20-25 family members are actively involved in our philanthropic activities that is supported by the whole family.

Areas of giving

Focus of giving

We support underprivileged women, children and families.

Country/region

We are active in Finland and internationally, preferably in communities where we have businesses or history.

Other aspects worth noting

Collectively, we have three active foundations. Recently, we merged another family branch's foundation into the Eva Ahlström Foundation to accumulate resources and to have a greater impact. We appointed one relative from that branch to the board of the Eva Ahlström Foundation.

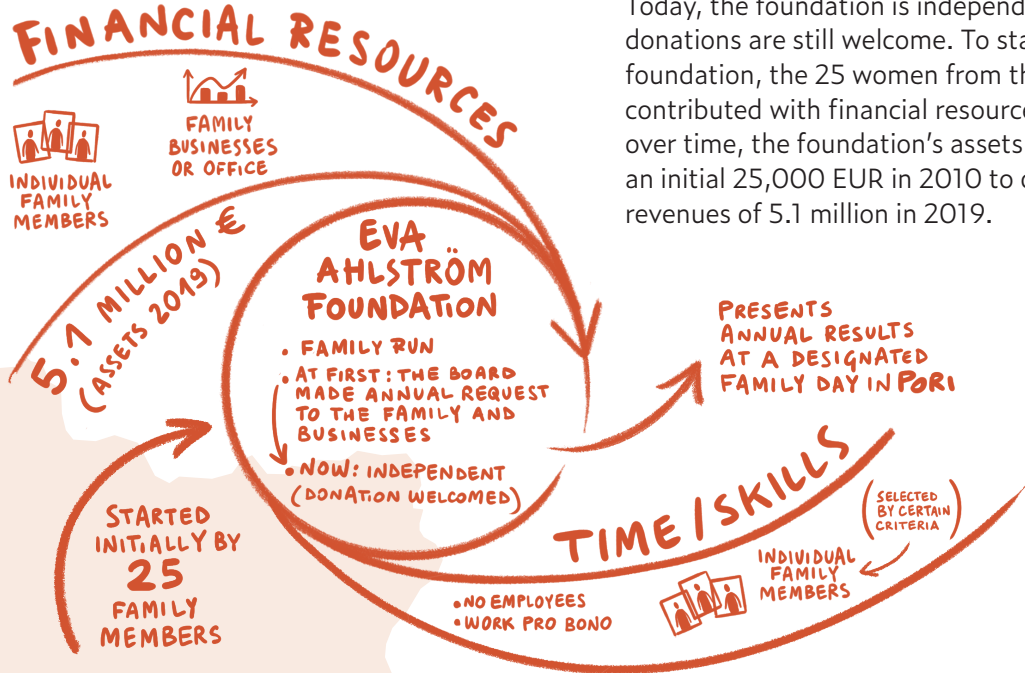
Structure of giving

Type of structure

The Eva Ahlström Foundation's financial resources come from individual family members and/or the family businesses. We receive no significant external funding. The foundation has since March 2020 a part time assistant, other than that the foundation and all subgroups are run by family members who volunteer their time and skills. We have a set of criteria in place that define the skills needed to join the board of the foundation.

Family governance/decision-making

The Foundation's board presents the work of the foundation at an annual family day at our traditional family residence. Initially, the foundation's board made annual financial requests to the family and business. Today, the foundation is independent, but donations are still welcome. To start the foundation, the 25 women from the family contributed with financial resources and, over time, the foundation's assets grew from an initial 25,000 EUR in 2010 to operating revenues of 5.1 million in 2019.



Navigator questions

Motivation

→ **What inspires us to give? What drives us to give now or continue giving?**
Our ancestors Eva and Antti Ahlström championed for women's equal right to education as well as a law that allowed for women to inherit and furthermore in various ways supported the communities in Finland where they had businesses. Over time, the family became less engaged in direct giving as the government and taxation took on an increasingly important role in tackling local issues such as education and healthcare. However, as the business became international and entered emerging, lower wage markets, we started challenging our role in society to see how we could support local communities wherever we are active. In 2010, we created the Eva Ahlström Foundation. The foundation made it possible for family members to be engaged and contribute to the family without having to be involved in the business. It became a platform for all family members to feel a part of something greater than themselves and contribute to the family's legacy in a meaningful way.


Focus

→ **What causes are we passionate about? In which regions do we give/want to give? Who or what ultimately benefits from our giving?**
We support underprivileged women, children and families in Finland and internationally. We have taken a strategic decision to work as a funding partner with recognized organizations as implementing partners. For example, UNICEF is our main partner.

Ambition

→ **What do we aim to achieve? What does success look like for us?**
We sincerely believe in doing The Right Thing according to universal values such as honesty, empathy, respect and justice. Our vision is to change the way Doing Good is perceived by advocating for compassion and action and strive to be the best version of ourselves. We recognize that money alone will not solve the world's problems but a change in attitudes and structures goes a long way. We are very open to talking about philanthropy and sharing lessons learned with other philanthropists. Success for us means building cohesion around our family, foundations, business, and giving. Recently, we launched an internationally recognized bold initiative called Ahlström Collective Impact in order to ensure that our various activities

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



- 1. Communicate – a lot!** 25 women in the family started with a vision to improve the state of the world as a family. However, over time, we realized that in order to achieve this goal we had to communicate a lot more and a lot clearer with different members of the family if we wanted to engage them. Not doing this early on resulted in an artificial divide between “us” and “them.” If you wish to engage your wider family, prepare a clear vision and communicate it often to different family members to ensure that they get equally excited and ultimately join your cause.
- 2. Find your allies within the family.** As you are creating a network within the family, it's important that you identify “early adopters” or “allies,” who believe in you and share your dream. Ideally, such a person will also enjoy a high level of respect from many family members, so that you can leverage him/her as a multiplier of your cause. It will take time and effort to create these ties, but it will most certainly pay off – for your family and, ultimately, for your cause.
- 3. Aim at achieving a small success early on.** Start with small and humble, yet tangible and actionable, steps so that you can celebrate early successes. There's no value in pretending to solve all the world's problems in a massive mission statement. An early success, even if small, will help you gain trust and attention from the wider family.
- 4. Create ownership.** Everyone wants to feel needed and to belong to something special. Give everyone a task and praise them for what they have done. A small contribution is a contribution towards something more meaningful. This is particularly relevant if you seek to work with family members only (most likely on a pro bono basis) and not hire any outside professionals.
- 5. Find and leverage synergies.** When starting off, find a cause that brings everyone together or that everyone can relate to. Together, create something new from existing family values or history.
- 6. Build the right team.** Your family is the A Team. Everyone is needed: the players on the field, the ones on the bench cheering you on, the older ones having played their part. You cannot score a goal alone. Appreciate and articulate team effort.

are aligned and that we, collectively, strive towards maximum positive impact. We aim to inspire our family, employees, customers, business partners and other stake holders to do the “right thing” according to universal values within our respective realities and lives. We believe that the above together with smart financial contributions to the right implementing partners, will make a real difference in the lives of vulnerable women and children.