

## An Interview with Allan English, Founder and Chair of the English Family Foundation

***PBI allows us to find out what our partners' needs are, as well as our own areas for improvement. There are always things we could be doing better, and that's what this is all about.***

The English Family Foundation first participated in Pollinate's Philanthropic Benchmarking Initiative in 2015 and repeated the process again in 2017. Founder and Chair Allan English was introduced to the Initiative after reading an article about it in a newsletter from Philanthropy Australia.

### *Why was the EFF initially interested in participating in the PBI in 2015?*

I've used Net Promoter Score for the last ten years at Silver Chef and seen that it's been a terrific way of improving performance in business. Before PBI came up for the foundation space, there weren't other measures out there.

Philanthropy itself is a pretty insular type of business. No one calls us to account. You can give money away and do different things, but unless you have an external benchmark to review your performance, how do you know you're improving? It becomes just a naval gazing exercise wherein you think you're improving but have no real proof. In reality, the only truth is when your stakeholders are looking at you and telling you whether you're improving or not or how you're performing compared to others.

So, that's why I was interested in participating in the PBI – it was about understanding our partners better to identify things we could improve on and see how we were going compared to other foundations and from an overall perspective.

### *What was the rationale behind participation again in 2017?*



We got a lot out of the previous benchmarking exercise in 2015, through which we were able to identify opportunities to improve what we were doing. I'm a great fan of trying to live the promise of 'more and better philanthropy', and I see PBI as part of the 'better philanthropy' vision promoted by Philanthropy Australia.

***Benchmarking exercises are really good enabling tools for foundations to find clear pathways to improve our giving space within Australia.***

The other benefit of this process was providing the trustees with insights into the perspectives of our partners. Unless they're actively moving in the space, trustees aren't necessarily going to know how their partners feel. This is an external way of independently checking what our partners are actually thinking about the organisation, and also what's working and what's not.

I was also able to confirm that my perceptions of Belinda [CEO of EFF] were being validated by the marketplace. I could see that she was doing an excellent job and was well thought of in the sector by the most important people – the people she's dealing with on a day-to-day basis. That's why I think the benchmarking exercise is an important one.

*What has been your impression of the overall process and value PBI adds to EFF's relationship with its partners and broader networks?*

Well, people who are open to being measured on their performance tend to be doing a pretty good job anyway. They aren't fearful of the process. Those that are secretive or don't want to be externally examined are probably the ones who need to be looking at this so they have pathways to improve.

I'm not saying that everyone who participates is totally getting it right, but most of the foundations that have participated to date have received a very high score and are obviously doing very good things. But the important point is that we've all been keen to learn more and participate so that we can improve the quality of our giving. That's the driver.



***We can't just be doing 'good'. We've got to be doing something 'wow' - something that's touching an individual and making them feel like this is exceptional, above the norm, worth sharing at the weekend BBQ. PBI helps us set benchmarks that drive our highest performance.***

*What action is EFF taking from the Sept 2017 results? What will be the benefits of this action?*

We had a number of direct learnings from the PBI process, and we've taken action around specific strategic projects.

One is our project for a new website. We're working on revamping and refreshing it this year, as that's how we're seen by others. Another project is the need to secure additional resources. In the areas that we'd dropped in satisfaction, we could clearly trace this back to our core team being stretched too widely with an increasing volume of work due to the overall growth of the Foundation. This has led to the appointment of Jemima, our new Grants and Impact Officer, who is now supporting Belinda in managing EFF's administrative work. We're also working on our overall impact measurement – both of ourselves and our projects.

*One of the things identified by partners in the PBI survey was EFF's 'innovative, dynamic, progressive' focus. Did you resonate with this finding?*

Well, yes. That's how we are. We're prepared to take risks, to fail, to test new things. And PBI is one tool that helps us to do this.



I think our lens of being entrepreneurial and innovative is really driven by the realisation that we've got a limited number of resources, so it's about maximising those resources to our maximum capacity in order to have the most positive impact that we can.

***We can all think innovatively and say, well, not only do we have financial resources, but we also have skills and contacts, so how can we leverage up those other, non-financial resources to deliver greater and positive impact?***

*What role would you envisage PBI playing in the philanthropic space within Australia over the next ten years?*

We want to continue doing this survey! From our perspective, we think it's really important that PBI continues to grow – there needs to be far more foundations participating in the process so that we all get a better benchmarking exercise.

We'd encourage Pollinate to actively engage in marketing and awareness campaigns and have clear goals around bringing more foundations on board. There's so much rich material that comes out of these survey reports that could be shared with others and communicated to the sector at large in order to increase awareness and participation. For existing members, case studies like this are also a great way of getting information about the benefits of benchmarking out there.

Overall, PBI is a really good exercise for foundations to do. We learn from it, we get better because of it, and we need others to participate, in order to grow the value of the benchmarking exercise to fulfil the goal of more and better philanthropy for the sector.

