

FAMILY OFFICE SERVICES: CASE STUDY

# From Liquidity Event to Lasting Legacy: Building a Family Office Around Shared Values



For three generations, one family had built a food and beverage company that was well known in their community and central to who they were as a family. Long before the sale, they were already managing considerable complexity, including multiple homes, a private plane, a substantial philanthropic foundation, and a range of shared assets supported by a hybrid family office and a team of outside advisors.

When they made the decision to sell, the liquidity event exceeded \$600 million. The money changed their financial picture significantly. What it did not change was the underlying question the family had been circling for some time: how do you build a family office that is as intentional as the business that funded it?

## Choosing to Work with FBCG

The family — a G2 patriarch and matriarch, three G3 siblings and their spouses, and eight G4 grandchildren in their early teens — came to FBCG with a focused request: help them create a family council and a constitution that brings more members of the family, especially the rising generation, into meaningful engagement with the legacy they were building to protect multi-generational wealth.

They began working with Jennifer Strom, a senior consultant with The Family Business Consulting Group who works with multi-generational families navigating transitions in wealth and ownership. Jennifer encourages families to pause and consider the “why” of a family office before the how or what. “We find that the most effective family offices operate first as family systems and second as financial systems,” she explained. “When a family begins with identity, mission and shared values, everything else – governance, investment strategy, education – aligns more naturally.”

Jennifer asked the family to articulate a North Star, a clear sense of who they are and what they stand for. From there, they talked about what role a family office should play, how it could help them grow as stewards, and what they wanted their wealth to do for themselves, the next generation, and their community.

## At a Glance:

### COMPANY PROFILE

A multi-generational, family-owned food and beverage company, well-established in its regional community, sold for more than \$600 million. Prior to the sale, the family managed its wealth and shared assets through a hybrid family office supported by a team of outside advisors.

### FBCG SERVICES

- Family communication
- Ownership alignment through a family constitution
- Organizing and educating the family
- Family wealth preservation
- Governance architecture for family and family office
- Family education and next-gen engagement

### BENEFITS TO FAMILY & BUSINESS

Working with FBCG, the family established governance documents, shared asset policies, and distribution guidelines developed through a structured process with input from all family members.

A family council, an entrepreneurial fund, and an educational curriculum were put in place to engage G3 and G4 members — including spouses — as active participants in ownership.



## The Challenge

With that sense of purpose established, Jennifer turned to the family's governance goals and found a much wider set of questions: who had decision-making authority over which assets, how investment decisions related to family decisions, where trustees fit in, and whether the existing documents actually reflected what the family intended.

"There is a lot of complexity when you start looking at the structure of a family office," Jennifer said. "You have a family council making family decisions, an investment committee overseeing the bulk of the wealth, and board members advising on real estate and other assets. And then there is the question of how wealth is accessible to each generation — when it is held in trust, that brings in all the complexity of trustees, beneficiaries, and family members, who may or may not overlap."

Before recommending any structure, Jennifer conducted individual alignment interviews with every adult family member, their spouses, and key stakeholders, including non-family executives, financial advisors, estate planners, and advisory board members. The goal was to understand each person's relationship with the wealth: their expectations, their concerns, and the guardrails they felt were important. The interviews also helped build trust and gave Jennifer a clearer sense of each person's communication style.

Through that process, Jennifer found that the complexity this family faced was as much relational as structural. The patriarch had long been the primary decision-maker, a leadership style that had served the operating business well but did not translate easily to the collaborative governance a multi-generational family office requires. Family members who worked outside the office often felt their perspectives carried less weight. The siblings were beginning to spread geographically and engage in different ways, raising real questions about how a family so deeply rooted in one community would stay connected over time.

There were also quieter tensions around wealth itself: what it meant for each generation, what was appropriate to spend or share, and how to talk about those things honestly. These were not conversations they could easily have with their financial advisors, attorneys, or peers.

"There's never really been anyone who knows everything that goes on in their family," shared Jennifer. "There's a relief in being able to talk about the wealth with someone who knows the parent relationships, the sibling relationships, the history, all of it."

Jennifer's review of the family's trust documents added a more urgent concern to the list. In their current form, non-family executives could make consequential decisions about family assets without adequate owner oversight. The family had talented, trustworthy people in their office. The issue was not their character. The documents simply did not say what the family thought they said and, with their estate attorney, they were able to revise the existing decision-making structure.

## The Engagement

Jennifer's work with the family developed across several phases over multiple years, each building on the relationships and clarity established in the one before it.

### Phase 1: Family Values and the Family Constitution

From those discovery conversations, the family and Jennifer came together for a family meeting where they explored key themes from the interviews, surfaced areas of alignment and tension, and developed a roadmap for their work together, starting with a family constitution.

"The family constitution is less about the deliverable and more about the process," Jennifer explained. "What it allows us to do is talk about the assets that are shared, why the family is doing this together, what they value, and what kinds of policies they ultimately need."

The constitution addressed the family's ultimate vision for protecting multi-generational wealth by documenting the shared values, decision-making across the many dimensions of shared assets, distribution policies, and the family's deep commitment to their philanthropic foundation and community roots.

The matriarch had long been a steady presence on questions of family identity and values: what the family stood for, how they were perceived in their community, and what they wanted to pass on. Her perspective helped ground the work in the family's longer history, not just their current financial circumstances. The siblings were also beginning to spread across different cities, and the process opened up honest conversation about how a family so tied to one place would stay connected as it grew. The constitution was built with every voice at the table.

Spouses were full participants from the start — included in the education and family council process as part of the ownership picture, not as observers. The engagement also produced an employment policy with clear parameters for family members who might work in the family office or serve on its board, best established well before a specific situation requires it.

### Phase 2: Governance Structure

With the family constitution as a foundation, the work turned to governance architecture. Working alongside the family's estate planners and attorneys, Jennifer coordinated the decision-making framework by mapping authority across every level of the family office, including the investment committee, trustees, family council, and board, and identifying the gaps between what the family intended and what the existing documents provided.

"When we looked closely at the documents and how the checks and balances were set up, the family was in a more vulnerable position than they realized," Jennifer explained. "They had trustworthy people in the office, but that wasn't the issue. If they ever had a bad egg, that person could have made decisions that really should have belonged to the family." Correcting those documents before any succession event or personnel change was among the most consequential work of the engagement.



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*Senior consultant Jennifer Strom helped the family protect both their assets and their relationships through thoughtful structure, open communication and education.*





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The advisory board was restructured during this phase as well, with a five-year plan to transition toward a full fiduciary board. Part of that work will involve identifying independent directors with the right knowledge for a family office board closely tied to the trust structure, drawing on candidates the family has in mind as well as those FBCG can bring to the table.

### Phase 3: Education and Ongoing Engagement

One of the leading generation’s core concerns from the beginning was entitlement. With this level of wealth passing to a generation that had not built it, the question of how to raise engaged stewards rather than passive beneficiaries was never far from the surface.

Jennifer has a clear view on this. “If you disempower the next generation by not sharing what they own, not educating them, and not giving them any voice, you get the opposite of what you want,” she said. “Disengagement is a much higher predictor of entitlement than empowerment. It is far better to empower and educate.”

With that understanding in place, Jennifer designed a tiered education curriculum for G3 and G4, with components shared across the whole family and generation-specific tracks that grew in complexity over time. Annual family meetings and regular family council sessions throughout the year create consistent rhythms of learning and connection, even as branches of the family become more geographically dispersed.

The family also established an entrepreneurial fund through which next-generation members can pitch business ideas to the investment committee and access capital under a formal loan policy. It asks family members to do the work: develop a concept, make a case, and go through the governance process that the family built together. One G3 member recently used it to launch a food compliance software company inspired by her experience in the legacy food business. For the patriarch, watching that unfold has been one of the more meaningful demonstrations that the structures they put in place are working as intended.

He now calls Jennifer regularly on topics that have nothing to do with formal governance: family member compensation, board internship programs, how to approach the next generation on a particular question. The relationship has become something different from what it started as, and more useful because of it.

## What the Family Built Together

Over time, several shifts became visible across the family and the family office.

- **Someone who knows the whole picture.** The family had strong advisors across every dimension of their wealth. What they did not have was someone whose only job was the family itself. Because FBCG provides consulting services only — no financial products, no legal work — both family members and non-family executives in the office came to trust Jennifer’s role. That made certain conversations possible that had not been possible before.

- **Governance documents that protect the ownership voice. The original trust documents left real vulnerabilities.** Getting those corrected before a succession event or a personnel change was one of the most important outcomes of this work, even if it is not the most visible one.
- **A shift in how the family communicates around shared assets and wealth.** The patriarch had always been the decision-maker. Jennifer worked with the family long enough to shift that dynamic. He now asks family members what they think before he acts, checks his own assumptions, and creates room for other perspectives. The matriarch's voice became more visible in the process, and family members who worked outside the office came to be treated as equally important voices in ownership decisions.
- **A rising generation that is engaged rather than waiting.** G3 members who previously had no relationship with the family office now have concrete ways to participate through the entrepreneurial fund, the education curriculum, the foundation, and the family council. Spouses are part of that picture as well, engaged with context and standing. The goal has always been to develop stewards, and the early signs are that it is working.
- **Guardrails that head off future conflict.** Policies and guidelines around shared properties, distributions, and loan decisions were built with everyone at the table. Because they were developed through a fair process in which all voices were heard, family members understand them and feel a sense of ownership over them. That is a very different foundation than rules handed down from the top.



## Looking Forward

The work continues. A board evolution phase lies ahead, the education curriculum will keep developing as the rising generation grows, and Jennifer remains a regular presence as the family and the family office navigate new questions together.

"They have lots of people protecting their assets," she reflected. "I truly believe that if we protect the family's relationships, they will work together to protect their assets, as long as the right governance structures are in place and people understand those structures, and there's transparency and trust across the family."

### Let's Start a Conversation

If your family is navigating a liquidity event, building a family office, or figuring out what to do with what you've built, call us at (773) 604-5005, [email info@thefbcg.com](mailto:info@thefbcg.com) or visit [www.thefbcg.com](http://www.thefbcg.com). There is absolutely no obligation.

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*The family established an entrepreneurial fund through which next-generation members can pitch business ideas to the investment committee and access capital under a formal loan policy.*