Theory of Philanthropy: How, Why, Questions, and Challenges
Today’s Guiding Questions

• Why articulate a theory of philanthropy?
• What is the articulation process like?
• What was the role of the foundation’s stakeholders (team, board, evaluators, etc.)?
• What tangible products came from the process? How are they used? Who engages with them?
• What new questions did the theory of philanthropy development process prompt the foundation to ask about itself? What questions did the foundation revisit in a new way? Why did those questions matter?
• How is the explicit theory of philanthropy incorporated and used in the Foundation?
• What pitfalls or traps did the foundation find itself in through the process?
• What doesn’t the theory of philanthropy do? What have been its limits?
Introductions

Gifty Amarteifio, Ph.D
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Member

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Blandin Foundation
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Michael Dominowski
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TerraLuna’s mission is to weave connections and support change at the intersection of learning, arts, and social justice.

All of TerraLuna’s work is undertaken with these values serving as guiding principles:
• Social justice
• Social equity
• People-focused
• Inclusive and responsive evaluation
• One size does not fit all
“Our mission is to be a trusted partner and advocate to strengthen rural Minnesota communities, especially the Grand Rapids area. Our vision is healthy, inclusive rural communities.”
“Our mission is to change the odds for people who struggle to advance economically in our communities.

We are committed to ensuring that those experiencing the most substantial barriers and disparities can maintain family-sustaining employment and financial health. We believe in the power of inclusive, community-based action to accelerate change in the institutions and systems that ensure all people are economically secure and mobile.”
“A theory of change hypothesizes how change occurs in the world; a theory of philanthropy articulates a foundation’s role in supporting change.”

Patton, Foote, Radner, 2015, p. 7
Reflective Practice

Learning deepens understanding → Develops understanding

Clarity + Coherence

Intention directs action + learning → Focuses intention

Reflective Practice
Clarity + Coherence, Parts of the Whole

- Niche - clean rivers
- Collaboration with public and private actors
- Invest in clean tech (ag. solutions)
- Use of leadership (voice, power, and influence)
- Risk?
- Consultants facilitate network
- What to evaluate?
  - Programs (grant)
  - Network?
  - Investments
  - Collaborative (pub/priv) network
  - Role of leadership
  - Etc.
Questions?
This process is not linear or neat. There is value in following wherever the reflections lead you and embracing the complexity and nuance that surface about your institution’s approach.
Questions?
Takeaways, Learnings, and Future Uses

What is the current state of the theory of philanthropy at the Blandin Foundation and Thrivent Foundation?

How is it used? Revisited? Modified?
Questions?
Contact Us

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Exercise: Individual Reflection

**Question 1:** Consider how much clarity and coherence your organization holds within each element and why?

**Question 2:** What interconnections among these elements need more clarity and coherence within your organization?

- **4** – We are crystal clear, and everyone is on the same page
- **3** – We are generally clear and share coherence about this element with some small differences or variation
- **2** – Some clarity and coherence exist but there are some major differences in perception or opinion
- **1** – We talk about this element but have little to no clarity or coherence
- **NA** – We don't even talk about this element of philanthropy
Exercise: Pair and Share

With a partner, discuss your reflections to the following questions.

- What did you notice?
- Where in your organization do you have more and less clarity and coherence?
- What interconnections have more or less clarity?
- How might more clarity and coherence within one or more element support your philanthropic purpose?
Exercise: Reflection

What is sticking with you from this activity?

What did you learn from this session and who in your organization do you plan to share it with?