



The Need for Courageous Action Today

Friends and Partners,

Let there be no question. Blandin Foundation stands against racism, hate and bigotry and for communities working across differences so that all residents can thrive.

Words that must be said today, with Charlottesville fresh in our minds and hearts, and every day.

Rural Minnesota communities are facing changes and pressures today that test long-held assumptions and challenge us to forge new relationships. Yes, racism, hate and bigotry are alive in rural Minnesota, too, and must be met with hope, leadership and the firm belief that communities are stronger when they work for all residents.

I have seen what can be possible when even a few people and even a small town decide to come together, to catalyze and sustain changes that would make a community — my community — a place that welcomes and works for everyone.

For 22 years, I lived in Bemidji, Minnesota after growing up on the Red Lake Reservation. I still remember what it felt like to go to the local grocery store. I was followed, watched, treated like I didn't belong. At the check-out, I was the only one asked for ID. It was overt racism.

Bemidji is a wonderful example of what is possible when community members say, "My community is better than this; things are going to be different." It started with a few people, including the owner of the same grocery store. By the time I left Bemidji for Grand Rapids and the Blandin Foundation, things in Bemidji had changed—and it's an even more welcoming, healthy community today!

There is no silver bullet. Big change takes time.

On the heels of Blandin Foundation's 75th anniversary last year, our trustees and staff set forth refreshed values to guide our course ahead. We said, "As stewards of the Blandin Foundation legacy, we commit ourselves to a leadership role on these deeply held beliefs:

- ***Inclusion is vital*** – We recognize all people, voices and worldviews as essential to healthy community.
- ***Relationships matter*** – We encourage courageous dialogue, trust, and reciprocity among partners to create positive change.
- ***Integrity is core*** – Our actions are guided by honesty, transparency and trustworthiness.”

Never have our values challenged us as they do today. And that’s intentional. Because communities cannot be strong, healthy and vibrant unless they are working for and safe for everybody. There is more to do, work that is not comfortable or easy. For example,

- We started with ourselves, recognizing that we see the world through the lenses of many advantages, too often minimizing differences rather than seeing, embracing and honoring them. We recognize our limitations, and don’t let that stop our trying.
- We have accepted the challenge to work openly for equity—working with others to close the gaps that divide our communities and prevent us from the ambitious, vibrant futures we seek for ourselves and for our children.
- And we are deliberate in seeking partners and grantees who share our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as well as healthy, vibrant, rural communities.

Every day, every person has opportunities to take fearless action. To lead, to take a stand, to listen. To seek relationships that open up possibilities, not those that feed prejudice.

Our country needs the hopefulness and courageous leadership that can come from our communities. Because communities can never afford to give up and cannot afford to leave neighbors behind.

You are the leaders we have been waiting for.

**Kathy Annette, president and CEO
Blandin Foundation**