ORGANIZATION
Blandin Foundation

POSITION
Director of Rural Advocacy

APPLICATION DEADLINE
Applications will be accepted until December 23, 2022 with review of candidates beginning immediately. We encourage and appreciate early applications.

COMPENSATION
The targeted compensation range is $130,000-$150,000

BRIEF
Ballinger | Leafblad is pleased to conduct the search for Director of Rural Advocacy at Blandin Foundation in Grand Rapids, Minnesota

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ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Blandin Foundation is a private foundation based in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. The Foundation was founded by Charles K. Blandin in 1941 and is the state’s largest rural-based and rural-focused foundation. The Foundation’s staff and Board of Trustees work diligently to ensure that Charles Blandin’s legacy is served. Grants are provided to the home giving area (defined as the geographic area containing Itasca County plus Hill City, Remer, Blackduck, and Northome, Minnesota) and other areas of rural Minnesota. The Foundation also conducts its own programmatic work in Rural Advocacy and Rural Talent Development. Blandin Foundation is the sole beneficiary of a Residuary Trust established by C.K. Blandin.

A staff of 30-plus professionals, based at the Foundation’s offices in Grand Rapids, facilitates the work of the Foundation.

Learn more at https://blandinfoundation.org/
HISTORY

Charles K. Blandin founded the organization in 1941 and passed away in 1958 following distinguished careers in education, publishing and paper-making. He established the Foundation to aid and promote Grand Rapids and the surrounding area. In designing the Foundation, Blandin emphasized flexibility to ensure it could adapt to changing times with an underlying philosophy that its work should lead to the “betterment of mankind.” The Foundation continues to have a special relationship with the home giving area (Itasca County, plus neighboring communities of Hill City, Remer, Northome and Blackduck) and does strategic grantmaking in other rural communities across Minnesota.

Located in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, the Blandin Foundation is one of only a handful of foundations in the U.S. focused exclusively on rural communities and is the largest rural-based private foundation in Minnesota. The mission of the Blandin Foundation is to “connect, fund and advocate for ideas and people to inspire resourcefulness and move rural places forward.”

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The culture at Blandin Foundation is positive and collaborative. Staff members describe the culture as:

» Mission and Community-centered
» Person-centered, compassionate
» Accountability is valued
» A learning organization

EQUITY STATEMENT

The Blandin Foundation’s location in Rural Minnesota drives its approach to equity. The Foundation puts rural culture at the center of its work, striving to be a catalyst for fair access to opportunities and conditions where all rural people can choose their future.

As a learning organization, staff are given space to change and grow to advance equity in the Foundation and in the communities we serve.

The equity statement adopted by our board can be found at this link: BlandinFoundationEquityStatement
VALUES
We Love Rural
We choose to live where the lives of people and land depend on each other. Our work and friendships bridge the distances we face. When challenges arrive, we lend a hand to get things done.

Courage Through Change
We call attention to disparity. We think deeply and critically about solutions. We take wise, creative approaches confidently, to meet the future.

Lead With Compassion
We know our neighbors’ lives up close, and advocate for and with people who are not often heard. They inspire us to build forward toward communities where respect, harmony and integrity flourish.

Seeds for the Future
We learn from the past. We grow and sustain the resources in our care. We carry our founder’s community-minded spirit as we care for the future.

VISION
We envision rural Minnesota places that welcome diversity, address injustice, and embrace change to create a sustainable and equitable future

MISSION
We connect, fund and advocate for ideas and people to inspire resourcefulness and move rural places forward

FRESH DIRECTION
Our new vision invigorates our approach: Rural Minnesota places that welcome diversity, address injustice and embrace change to create a sustainable and equitable future.

We are retooling our grantmaking and developing programs to build on our experience in community leadership and broadband, and align toward this vision.

NEW FRAMES
The Foundation is using two fresh frames to bring rural's unique needs into crisper focus and to structure our work to best align with the greatest needs. We will continue to pursue two distinct but interwoven strategies, one for the Home Giving Area, and one for statewide rural work.

EQUITY OF PLACE, RACE AND CLASS
Rural communities and especially Native Nations face systemic discrimination because of place, race and class. We are refocusing our work priorities to address the ways these facets of discrimination are layered, and how their effects build on each other.

RURAL FISCAL POLICY
We will bring new research to changemaking conversations. We will raise rural voices in service to people pushed to the margins of our communities, who live the realities of these policies every day. We will provide skill building so rural people can raise their own voices on issues that matter most to them.
STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Two years of compounding crises - the global pandemic, racial unrest, and election uncertainty - have laid bare disparities of place, race and class faced by rural communities in Minnesota.

As the largest Minnesota-based foundation serving only rural communities, Blandin Foundation engages deeply in rural communities. The realities facing rural Minnesota communities and Native Nations today call us to find new ways to help rural people build toward strong futures.

With the help of leaders across Minnesota, and doing deep research, the Foundation reached conclusions about what’s needed to make change happen. These concepts are at the heart of our Theory of Change.
Blandin Foundation integrates across three program areas to achieve our mission:

**Rural Grantmaking:** Blandin Foundation is a strategic grantmaker. The most substantial and broadest form of grantmaking occurs in Itasca County and parts of the Leech Lake Reservation known as the “home-giving area.” Grants are made in this region to advance the following outcomes:
- Leaders are using advanced skills to better address disparities.
- Leaders are leveraging new resources, inspiring change, and advancing sustainability.

Blandin Foundation also grants funds to rural Minnesota communities to advance the following outcome:
- Rural communities are accessing the power and resources needed to innovate, to change systems to work better for everyone, and to drive development toward a more equitable and sustainable Minnesota.

Priority is placed on projects that:
- Serve communities under 20,000.
- Embrace change to create an equitable and sustainable future.
- Are inclusive and collaborative, engaging those who benefit from the intended change.
- Address injustice.
- Inform and connect community leaders on issues relevant to rural Minnesotans.

**Rural Human Capacity Building:** One of the most dramatic changes to our programmatic work in the last two years is in what was formerly known as the Leadership Program. As we embrace our value of Leading with Courage, we ended our longstanding Blandin Community Leadership Program. While the program holds an important place in the Foundation’s history, we know we cannot face this unique moment in our history without embracing the opportunity to design a human capacity program that adapts in a way that speaks to the gravity of the challenges faced by communities in this recovery.

Given the opportunity of the break from traditional programming and the opportunity of the demographic shifts to train a new generation of leaders, we envision the following under the larger umbrella of capacity building:
- An environment in our headquarters where staff and guests can grow and learn.
- Coordination of facilitation support for Collective Impact work with partners in our Home Giving Area.
- A scholarship program that can flex and expand to strategically support Workforce Development.
- A customized leadership institute that serves rural leaders with a variety of offerings from seminars to credentialed fellowships.

Utilizing our design framework, we intend to convene leaders from across the state and a variety of leadership roles to guide the development of our credentialed leadership programming.

**Rural Advocacy:**

The Advocacy Program blends our past experience in policy with our communications department using a robust data-driven approach to strategy. The Director of Rural Advocacy will be the person to lead that development.

Advocacy areas will include:

**Rural Fiscal Policy:** By many measures, rural places do not receive their fair share of funding and other resources. Blandin Foundation is orienting its work to make these realities seen and heard, and to equip rural people to talk about and ask for the resources they need to get to work on the change that’s needed to systems that undervalue and underfund rural communities.

**Just Energy Transitions:** In 2007, Minnesota set a goal of reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. While this transition will be challenging for rural communities, it will create opportunities to examine and change the structures that hold back communities from pursuing sustainable solutions.
SUMMARY

At the Blandin Foundation, rural is central. In these rural places, where work and friendships bridge the distances we face, the organization builds toward a sustainable, equitable future for all the people who live and work in rural Minnesota.

This position is responsible for overseeing, developing, and implementing program direction and planning for the Rural Advocacy strategy for the Foundation. The director collaborates with colleagues and Foundation partners to ensure advocacy programming is designed and adapted to the needs of rural communities.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Director of Rural Advocacy reports to Senior Director of Programming. There is one Senior Rural Advocacy Associate who reports to the Director of Rural Advocacy.

ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Rural Advocacy Team
- Direct all activities of the Rural Advocacy Team.
- Develop, implement, and monitor Rural Advocacy budget.
- Develop, implement, and monitor the annual Rural Advocacy workplan based on strategic outcomes of the organization.
- Ensure the Rural Advocacy Team achieves a high level of functioning to achieve organizational objectives.

Rural Advocacy Strategy and Implementation
- Develop and execute the Rural Advocacy policies, processes, and approaches in alignment with the strategic plan.
- Research and develop policy positions in alignment with the Foundation’s strategic priorities, and in accordance with organizational policies and processes.
- Develop and execute comprehensive internal and external advocacy and strategic communications to support the Foundation’s strategies.
- Utilize the Foundation’s research to inform and develop content to regularly raise up specific rural inequities based in class, race, and place.
- Help translate strategy into action, supporting program teams in telling their stories, shifting narratives, and amplifying ideas and innovations.
- Advance the Foundation’s practice of strategic communication foundation-wide, elevating the foundation’s voice and thought leadership at key strategic moments.

Program Team
- Works collaboratively with other program directors on issues of high strategic importance
- Works closely with other program directors to ensure full integration of advocacy programming across functional areas to advance the Foundation’s strategy.
DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor’s degree with a focus on rural public policy, strategic communications, or a related field
- 7-10 years of related experience
- Five or more years of managerial level experience
- Demonstrated commitment to rural Minnesota communities
- Knowledge and experience in the philanthropic or nonprofit sector

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

- Commitment to Equity
- Excellent analytical, detail-oriented, and problem-solving skills
- Excellent time management, prioritization, and organizational skills
- Communication and listening skills
- Demonstrate and embrace Blandin Foundation’s values
- Practice continuous learning to grow personal/professional knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Act with integrity, adaptability, accountability, confidentiality, and transparency
- Flexible and adaptable to change in the workplace
- Ability to work with others from a wide range of cultural backgrounds
- Ability to adhere to high standards of accuracy and to exhibit a strong attention to detail
- Ability to work well independently and in a team environment
- Ability to communicate effectively with a focus toward a culture of service
- Ability to work with a high level of proficiency in Microsoft Office 365
- Skilled in both written and verbal communication
- Ability to develop clear messaging and work with the media when necessary

LOCATION

This position works primarily out of the Grand Rapids, Minnesota office.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

The targeted salary range for this position is $130,000-$150,000. Compensation includes participation in the comprehensive benefits plan.

TO APPLY

Inquiries may be directed to Holly Kelsey-Henry: holly@ballingerleafblad.com or Marcia Ballinger, PhD: marcia@ballingerleafblad.com. Applications will be accepted until December 23rd or until the position has been filled, which may be earlier. There will be an immediate and ongoing review of candidates, so we encourage and appreciate early applications. All inquiries will remain confidential.
GRAND RAPIDS, IT’S IN MINNESOTA’S NATURE

Located just three hours north of the Twin Cities and an hour and a half from Duluth, Grand Rapids is located between the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation and the Mesabi Iron Range. Our location gives us a unique blend of cultures close to home.

The four distinct seasons in Grand Rapids are not only beautiful, but full of recreational choices. In the spring, summer and fall enjoy golf, hiking, biking, swimming, hunting, or simply relaxing with a summer breeze on the shore of one of the hundreds of regional lakes. When the snow falls, snowmobiling is popular on the more than 1,000 miles of groomed trails, as well as the many cross-country ski trails or try your hand at the Great Minnesota Pastime - ice fishing.

It’s easy to see why Grand Rapids, situated on the Mississippi, and the county seat of Itasca County, is noted as one of the “100 Best Small Towns in America.” It has an abundance of recreational opportunities, shopping, dining, natural beauty and so much more. The City of Grand Rapids is home to 200-plus acres of parks and nearly 50 miles of city trails for recreational pleasure. Throughout the city, park facilities offer a wide variety of uses including athletic fields, playground equipment, pavilions, picnic areas, basketball, tennis and horseshoe courts, outdoor hockey and skating facilities, water access, fishing piers and lighted ski trails.

RESOURCES

City of Grand Rapids | https://cityofgrandrapidmsmn.com/
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce | https://www.grandmn.com/community/
Visit Grand Rapids | https://visitgrandrapids.com/
Thrive Up North | http://www.thriveupnorth.com/
Grand Rapids Arts | https://grandrapidsarts.org/
Explore Minnesota | https://www.exploreminnesota.com/profile/visit-grand-rapids/2055

Grand Rapids became the first rural community in the nation to pilot an autonomous shuttle service