GRANTMAKING DECISION-MAKING OF A PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATION FUNDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE-FOCUSED INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY

by

Tanya Wightman Giovanni

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, single-instrument case study was to discover and understand how philanthropic foundations decide to fund community colleges by exploring the perceptions of the decision-making processes of the leadership team. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Cohen et al.'s garbage can model of organizational choice. Semi-structured interviews were used to engage with persons identified as members of the leadership team, decision-makers, and board of directors for the philanthropic foundation. The interviewed study participants were asked open-ended questions related to the central research question, 'What are the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations when deciding to fund community colleges and community college-focused intermediary organizations?' There were also examinations of documents and nonparticipant observational data collected relative to the research questions. The data was coded, analyzed, and interpreted to identify themes. Three themes emerged through data analysis: mission and priority alignment, strategic direction and focus (priorities, vision, mission, goals), and collaboration and flexibility. Understanding the decision-making of philanthropic foundations supporting community colleges provided new insights into effective practices for community colleges and revelations for the greater philanthropic field relative to decision-making processes. The results included that philanthropic foundation decision-makers use various methods to identify priorities and pursue impact, but the need for increased collaboration, storytelling, and adaptivity was identified to support the decision-making process and strategies.

Keywords: philanthropic foundations, decision-making, garbage can model, grantmaking, community colleges, intermediary organizations.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God the Father, my creator, Jesus/Yeshua, my brother and advocate, and the Holy Spirit, my comforter, Who has been with me as I groaned when I knew not what to say or what to pray.

I dedicate this to my rural community and the amazing teachers from Crystal City, Missouri, who inspired me to cherish the process of gaining knowledge as an often lonely but fulfilling endeavor.

To Tom and Bernice Wightman, I am blessed to call them family, and who have cheered me on, supported me, and shown me that love is a choice and is not determined by sanguinity or certificates.

To my mother, Alva Jane Brock, who gave me moral lessons on discipline from an early age and has always been my number one fan.

To the memory of my Aunt Loretta, who loved to hear me read and helped me memorize the 23rd Psalm, which I can still recite.

To my children, Luke and Cassidy, may you pursue knowledge throughout your lives and remember that God's people perish from a lack of knowledge but flourish in His wisdom.

To my husband, Dwight, who is also my cheerleader and patiently did not complain when he had to sleep with all of the lights on as I read and worked.

Acknowledgments

My committee chair, Dr. Dina Samora, who was the guiding light and the embodiment of Christian leadership, correction, and encouragement, every step of the way as I researched, wrote, rewrote, revised, and wrestled intellectually as intensely as Jacob in Genesis 32:22-32 with this dissertation.

My methodologist and committee member, Dr. James Eller, I was truly blessed to have your insight and you were a perfect foil through this process. I knew you would be tough from my coursework with you.

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Community College Research Center (CCRC)

Garbage Can Model (GCM)

Intermediary Organization (IO)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Community colleges received 6% of private philanthropic foundational grants made to higher education institutions in 2017 (Christophersen et al., 2019; 2020). Funding for community colleges is an essential and ongoing societal issue affecting many students and communities. Although these proportional shares of philanthropic funding are low, some philanthropic foundations decide to support these institutions by granting significant philanthropic funds to community colleges and community college-focused intermediary organizations (IOs). Community college-focused IOs serve as liaisons between endowed philanthropic foundations and community colleges. As a result of historical opacity, literature exploring the functioning of grantmaking foundations was sparse (Prewitt, 2006), and an understanding of their decision-making processes was lacking. As a result, there was a gap in the literature on the decision-making processes involved in philanthropic foundation funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Understanding how decisions were made to support strategies and fundees offered valuable insight into achieving goals and targets across policy and practice areas. In Chapter One, the researcher examined organizational decision-making, philanthropic foundations, and community colleges and intermediary organizations by analyzing several background contexts. These backgrounds consisted of the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for the philanthropic foundation funding of community colleges. In addition, this chapter included the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and a list of key definitions and terms used in the present study.

Background

This section outlines the historical context that illustrates the current funding need of community colleges, the social contexts that describe the financial, political, and historical policies surrounding philanthropic foundation decisions on community college funding, as well as the theoretical context that devotes attention to decision-making theories used in organizational behavior literature.

Historical Context

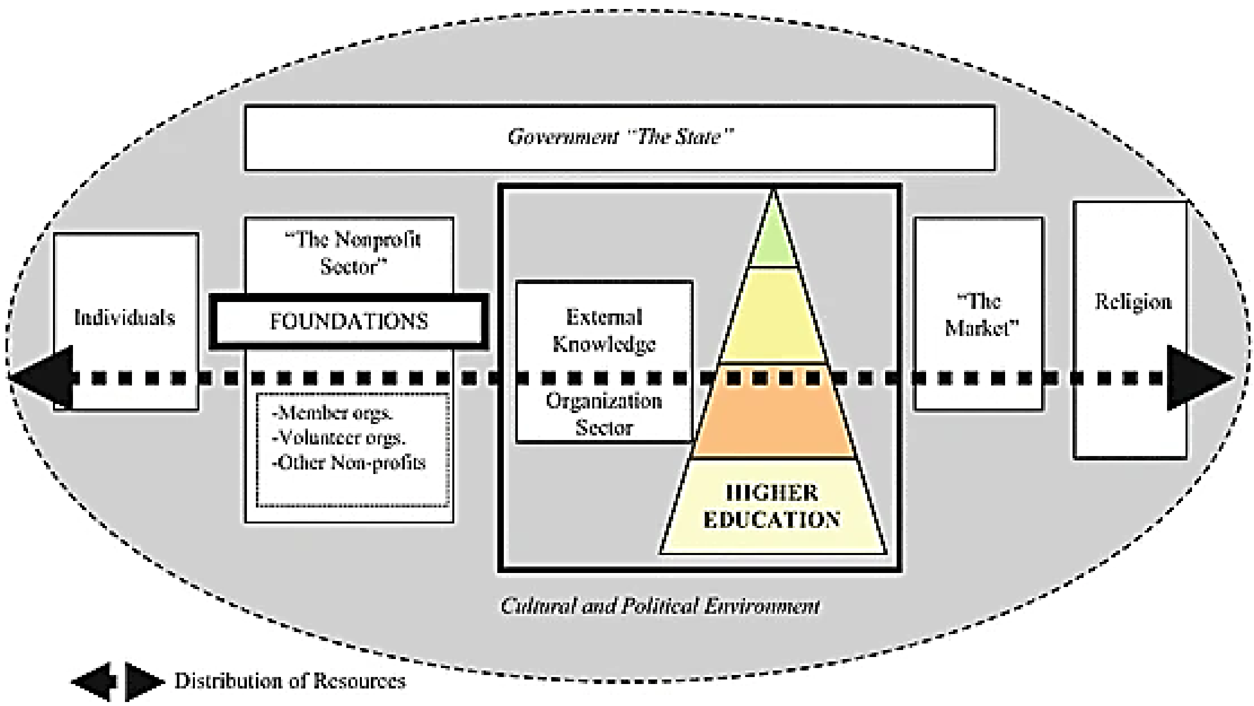
Higher education has been influenced and molded by philanthropic involvement since the founding of the oldest institution of higher education in the United States, private Harvard University, in 1636 (Drezner, 2011; Romano et al., 2010). The oldest four-year public universities, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Georgia at Athens, were chartered in 1789 and 1785. Each opened its doors to students in 1795 and 1801, respectively. In 1901, the first permanent public community college was created in Joliet, Illinois. Notably, the founding of Joliet Junior College occurred centuries after the founding of many private and public four-year universities, including those noted above. These founding years all predated the establishment of the first community college at Joliet by more than a century (McKay, 2017). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) was founded only in 1920 (Grubbs, 2020). Scutari (2019) points out that the youthfulness of community colleges challenges these entities in ramping up fundraising to the level of the elite universities.

Social Context

Scant empirical research existed to date exploring foundations' social impact tactics (Ricciuti & Calò, 2018). Some scholars declared philanthropic giving to be less than democratic because it dictates actions in the fields of culture, society, politics, and economics (Harvey et al., 2019). The research on this topic also takes a critical view of the impact of philanthropic foundations in the educational arena (Hossler & Jenness, 2019). However, this criticism may be misplaced as Hossler and Jenness assert that philanthropic foundations are not universal tools of hegemonic capitalism.

Figure 1

Depiction of Intersection between Higher Education, Foundations, and Other Societal Fields



Note. The Field of Higher Education Modified. From "Philanthropic foundations' social agendas and the field of higher education," by C. L. Barnhardt, in M.B. Paulsen (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 32, p. 233), 2017, Springer International Publishing. Copyright 2017 by Springer International Publishing. Reprinted with permission. Figure 1 reveals that the indicated entities are intertwined, as well as mutually dependent and mutually independent. Barnhardt advised the box surrounding higher education institutions and the external knowledge organization sector represent the tendency of the government, for-profit, religious, and society to regard the boxed sectors as nearly identical (2017).

This split in the institutional social positionality of philanthropic foundations further supports the need for research exploring philanthropic foundations' positive interactions and actions in the higher education space occupied by community colleges. Hossler and Jenness (2019) found that philanthropic foundations offer hope to producing more equitable communities. Philanthropic sway wields control over the public community, the system of strategies and customs, and ways of life within civilization and thus is a subject of general and communal interest (Erfurth & Ridge, 2021).

Through grant-making, foundations communicate and influence what the foundation believes to be the most beneficial method to accomplish the chosen target of societal transformation (Prewitt, 2006). Nevertheless, the onus remains on those seeking to receive philanthropic foundation funding to understand and discover what factors influence the funding decisions of philanthropic foundations.

Theoretical Context

How decisions are made was noted as an important area of research, and interest in the topic had exploded over recent years (Bruch & Feinberg, 2017). In examining the contributing factors to foundation decision-making on funding community colleges and community college-focused IOs, it was critical to consider the literature on both philanthropic foundations and decision-making theory found in the organizational behavior literature. As prominent and vital institutions in American society, how foundations make funding choices was significant. Sociologic decisions are often noted as obscure and lacking a clear best choice (Bruch & Feinberg, 2017) and demand an understanding of the social and institutional factors that influence decision-making. Considering the unique positioning of philanthropic foundations among organizations, their characteristic as organized anarchies, and being nearly fully autonomous within the societal system, exploring the organizational choice processes in a philanthropic foundation provides insight into practice and theories of organizational behavior.

Problem Statement

The problem is that community colleges are historically under-resourced (Fernandez & Hu, 2021; The Century Foundation Task Force on Preventing Community Colleges from Becoming Separate and Unequal, 2013) and need additional funding sources to fill in the shortages caused by ever-increasing reductions in traditional government funding (Christophersen et al., 2019; 2020; Kisker, 2021; White, 2022). Community colleges receive a small portion of philanthropic giving compared to other educational entities. The gap was a lack of understanding of how philanthropic foundations create strategies to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs and how they process their decision-making (Barman, 2017; Betsill et al., 2022; McClure et al., 2017). The answer to why foundations do what they do related to perplexing and wicked problems necessitates consideration (Craft & Guy, 2019).

According to the most recent report from Candid, private foundations hold over $960 billion in assets in 2018 and distributed $75 billion in total funding assistance in 2018 (Candid.org, 2020). Education, as a broad area, receives 26% of this largesse. In addition, Erfurth and Ridge (2021) stress the scarcity of research on philanthropy’s involvement in educational policies and provisioning, both nationally and internationally. Understanding the decision-making processes on how and to whom to distribute that 26% or $19.5 billion was a matter deserving exploration and research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, holistic, single-instrument case study was to explore the decision-making processes of decision-makers employed by or serving on the board of a philanthropic foundation that funds community colleges and community college-focused IOs. The theoretical framework informing this study was the garbage can model (GCM) of Cohen et al. (1972), as it explores how organized anarchies arrive at decisions through the intersection and interaction of the four streams of problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities. Open-ended interview questions, document review, and non-participant observations are used to gather the data.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study could make a difference by assisting philanthropic foundations in understanding the inner workings of foundation grantmaking decision-making and helping community colleges hone best practices when pursuing grants and funding. In addition, by understanding the decision-making process and the creation and implementation of strategies for foundation funding schemes, grant seekers can be more effective in obtaining funding.

Empirical Significance

Philanthropic foundations impact society through their decision-making policies on funding. Therefore, it was imperative to understand how they make these decisions. Foundations promote their ideals and principles by their funding decisions (Kundu & Matthews, 2019). The purpose of the study was to present data regarding philanthropic foundation decision-making processes. Although there have been prior studies on why foundations fund K-12 schools and the needs of community colleges for equitable funding from the state, the findings from this study will help in examining an area missing from the existing literature: the processes of decision-making of philanthropic foundations in the funding of community colleges. Offering a rich, deep, thick understanding of these decision-making processes adds to the understanding of the GCM and the base of knowledge and literature on philanthropic foundations, community colleges, intermediary organizations, and decision-making theory.

Theoretical Significance

There are two areas of theoretical significance in the study. First, the gap in the body of research, and second, an exploration of the applicability of the garbage can model to philanthropic foundation organizational decision-making. This trend in philanthropy involves the foundation leadership formulating strategies in making decisions on what they want to accomplish with their funding as a part of the mission and strategic vision of the foundation. As a result, there was also a need to understand the grantmaking decision-making processes philanthropic foundations use to make these funding decisions (Harvey et al., 2020; Manning et al., 2020; White, 2018). The garbage can model of organizational decision-making was developed by applying the model to the decision-making of philanthropic foundations as related to community colleges and community college-focused IOs.

Practical Significance

The focus of the proposed study was how foundation decision-makers implement decision-making processes and strategies. Leat et al. (2018) posited that how a foundation performs is determined by effective processes in decision-making. This research adds to the body of knowledge regarding philanthropic foundations as institutions by revealing how decision-makers process decisions to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs. The findings from this study expand the practical understanding and perspectives in the work of both philanthropic foundations and community colleges. This study was beneficial because it revealed the actual and perceived processes around funding, helped remove ostensibly invisible hurdles and knowledge gaps to understanding funding and goal achievement, and strengthened the legitimacy of these funding decisions and strategies.

Research Questions

The focus of the study was on the how of philanthropic foundation decision-making when considering supplying funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Based on the problem statement and purpose statement, the following central research question is:

Central Research Question

How do decision-makers employed by or serving on the board of a philanthropic foundation decide to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

Sub-Question One

How do philanthropic foundation decision-makers describe the processes to implement funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

Sub-Question Two

How do philanthropic foundation decision-makers describe their strategies in implementing funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

Definitions

1. *Board of directors/trustees* - The governing body of a nonprofit organization that makes policy decisions (Runquist, 2015). "In theory foundations, like all charities, are governed or controlled by a board of trustees (sometimes called 'directors' if the organisation is incorporated)" (Leat, 2016, p. 28).
2. *Community college* - Includes 900 public two-year colleges and 100 community colleges that offer limited bachelor's degrees. These 100 enroll about 2 million students and raise

the total to 44% combined for undergraduate percentage nationally (Community College Research Center [CCRC], 2021).

3. *Four-year college or university* - Four-year schools include both colleges and universities. These institutions offer bachelor's degree programs, which typically take four years to complete; in some cases, they also offer graduate and professional programs (https://learn.org/articles/What_are_4-Year_Schools.html)
4. *Garbage can model* - A model or framework on decision-making within an organization that meets the criteria for being identified as an organized anarchy (Cohen et al., 1972).
5. *Intermediary organization* - Conceptually, IOs operate as translating entities connecting sources of funds with targets to be influenced (Haddad, 2021).
6. *Organized anarchy* - Organized anarchies are organizations with the following characteristics (1) problematic preferences, (2) unclear technology, and (3) fluid participation (Cohen et al., 1972).
7. *Public two-year college* - Public two-year colleges are the 900 colleges that offer associate degrees but do not offer bachelor’s degrees. Approximately 8 million students, or 40% of undergraduates, attend these (CCRC, 2021).

Summary

Philanthropic foundations do good and noble things around the world. They have blessed millions with billions of dollars. They have assisted in ending multiple evils and ills around the globe and brought healing and hope through their work. The problem is that there is a need for significant funding support for community colleges, and there is disparate and unequal funding to community colleges compared to other higher education institutions. How philanthropic foundations decide to offer significant and atypical funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs warranted further inquiry. The purpose of this case study was to explore and understand the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations that fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Researchers should seek to understand the intersection between these entities' explicit and implicit organizational vision, missions, and strategies and their decision-making processes related to this important education sector, community colleges.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the processes that philanthropic foundations use in their decision-making when considering whether to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Chapter One included an overview of the intended study. Chapter Two begins with a review of the theoretical framework, the garbage can model of organizational choice, used in the study. Chapter Two continues with a review of the historical purpose of community colleges and the problem of the present state of financial need for philanthropic funding experienced by many community colleges. It then includes a review of the history and current literature on philanthropic foundation grantmaking practices towards higher education, including a synthesis of the most current literature regarding grantmaking decision-making by philanthropic foundations. Philanthropic typologies of grantmaking strategies and processes are addressed. Finally, the chapter concludes with the current literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on decision-making strategies and processes. The conducted literature review provided an understanding of the phenomena and processes of how decision-making by philanthropic foundations was perceived and implemented. A review of the literature revealed a gap supporting the need for this study. Grantmaking decision-making processes by philanthropic foundations to assist community colleges and community college-focused IOs are complex and important to the well-being of society and were a topic worthy of additional empirical study.

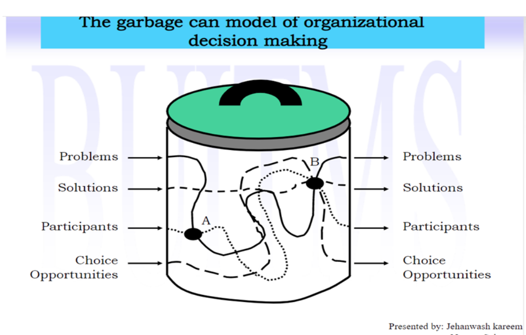
Theoretical Framework

The first words of a seminal article in the organizational behavior literature, entitled *A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice*, are “consider organized anarchies” (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 1; Jann, 2015). Organizational behavior scholars have declared these three words to be some of the most famous opening words in the literature of this field and one of the most famous metaphors in the annals of policy and administrative analysis (Jann, 2015). The garbage can model was the theoretical framework informing this study. Conceptual frameworks position the researcher's lens on the underlying why, how, and what forming the basis for the research study (Kivunja, 2018). This framework provided a way (method/model) to consider institutional decision-making practices within philanthropic foundations.

Cohen et al. (1972) defined organizations as decision opportunities within an organized anarchy encountering choices according to GCM. "An organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work" (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 2). Figure 2 shows how the streams enter, interact, intersect, produce decisions at points A and B within the garbage can, and how they may also exit the garbage can without producing a decision.

Figure 2

Illustration of the Garbage Can Model



Note. Image used with permission.

The GCM was appropriate for this study because the purpose of this study was to understand the process of decision-making in philanthropic foundations. GCM is instrumental in the nonprofit philanthropic space because these entities are often solutions looking for problems and house people who make decisions seeking a job to do (Cohen et al., 1972). The GCM framework guided this research study in determining or identifying how these philanthropic foundations process decisions when electing to fund community colleges generously. Irvin and Kavvas (2020) argued that research on foundations demands a theory that acknowledges the impact of shifting contexts. GCM was such a theory as it recognizes the fluidity and uniqueness of organized anarchies. That is, are these decisions based on a rational model of decision-making or more on feelings and emotions within an organized anarchy as supposed by the GCM. GCM was also well-suited to this study on nonprofit philanthropic foundations because the idea of charity and philanthropy can be perceived as nonrational according to economic theory and thinking.

This researcher explored the decision-making processes of the leadership and governance teams of the selected philanthropic foundation through research questions and data collection methods designed to reveal if the tenets of the GCM were found in those shared processes and strategies. The data gathering methods targeted the principals of the GCM and explored how decisions were made by the selected leadership and governance participants. The gathered data was examined through the lens of the GCM to assess if GCM explained the practices of philanthropic foundations in decision-making within complex conditions.

Related Literature

The purpose of the literature review was to explore the dynamics of grantmaking decision-making by philanthropic foundations in considering grantmaking to community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Related literature on community colleges, community college-focused intermediary organization, philanthropic foundations, and decision-making revealed that these topics are intertwined within the education, economic, social, and institutional frameworks. Community colleges are considered vital to the economy and assist many marginalized students in attaining higher education credentials. Edgecombe (2019) has described investing in these groups as paramount to the country's energy and stamina. Funding strategies can increase trust and assist in navigating existing dynamics of competition (Lynn et al., 2021). Philanthropic foundations are moving towards more impactful, strategic, and socially just missions and visions. Finally, organizational decision-making is the key work of organizational leaders and strives to align strategies with the organization's mission, vision, and values.

Inter-connectivity of Historicized Institutional Systems and Practices

The symbiotic locus and the intersectionality of philanthropic foundations and community colleges are worthy of study (Walton, 2019). Philanthropic foundations are dynamic organizations (Irvin & Kavvas, 2020). Philanthropic grantmaking foundations are well positioned to provide really imaginative and inventive solutions to our age's intractable issues. Unconstrained by most commercial and partisan restraints, such foundations are positioned to conceive the unimaginable, disregarding academic and practitioner limits, if they so desire. They may take chances and adopt strategies that others deem impossible to succeed, and they can fail without dire repercussions. Moreover, foundations may have long-term perspectives. Without the constraining confines of short-sighted and poorly conceptualized evaluation standards, foundations are free to be innovative and creative, crossing the lines between sectors, organizations, professions, and disciplines. Consequently, they may alter our ways of thinking, our goals, and our methods for establishing a truly civic society marked by mutual respect and dignity for everyone (Anheier & Leat, 2006).

Fleishman (2007) asserted that civic society's clandestine dynamic capacity is fueled by the work of philanthropic foundations and the benefactors of that funding. Second, philanthropic funding energizes innovative actions and varied investigative research within this sphere that lies between the market and the government in America. Third, foundations and supported organizations operate together to recreate society on a regular basis, to include reallocating control, dominion, and affluence (Fleishman, 2007). The educational system is a part of the distribution system, and an assortment of procedures operate in deciding how to distribute the educational system's benefits (Ericson, 1990). The education, social, and economic systems intertwine (Ericson, 1990). Ericson notes that what is important is how these systems are interconnected. He ties this connection to education benefits being social benefits and urges there is a socially just connection between the two. Working on equity and patterns of inequity involves an even greater need for understanding systemic complexities and the interdependent nature of these (Lynn et al., 2021).

Recognizing the complex interrelatedness of these systems may have a bearing on organizational decisions within each system as they relate to and interact with one another. Horn (2021) proposed that the shifting of philanthropic focus resulted in the emanation of novel organizations. Horn also noted that the complexity of the issues mandated a cross-field and intersectional course of action to address the trans-systemic problems. Institutional entities contain entrenched agendas and routines; accordingly, the institution's ecosystem influences the institution (Ericson, 1990).

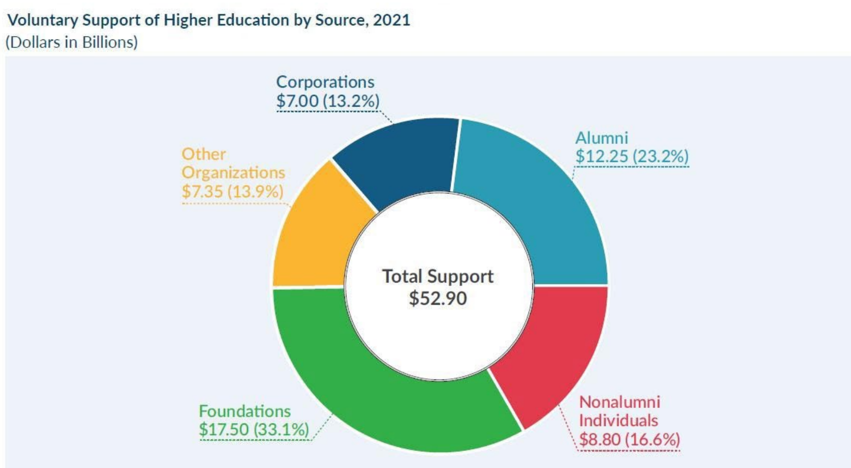
Moreover, the societal interactions fixed within the settings of institutions and organizations aid in producing prescriptive and intellectual understandings (Adloff, 2009). For example, little debate exists on education's influence and relevance on lifetime prospects

(Ericson, 1990). In addition, the education system's distribution system strongly intertwines with the systems of distribution in the social and economic systems (Ericson, 1990).

Figures 3 and 4 display the total dollar amounts given voluntarily to higher education and the trends by percentage over the past three decades. These fiscal resources are critical to the functioning and success of all higher education institutions, especially community colleges.

Figure 3

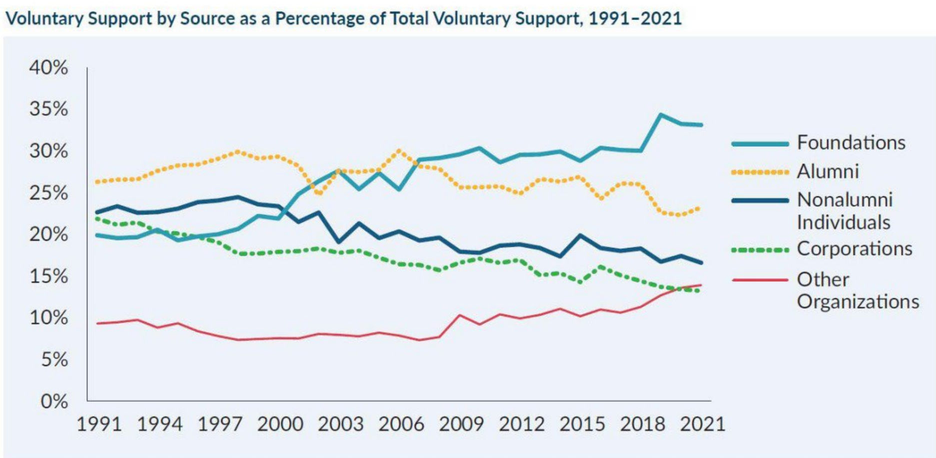
Voluntary Support of Higher Education by Source, 2021



Note. Figure 3 reveals that foundations comprise the most significant percentage of giving to higher education, followed by alumni. From "*Voluntary Support of Education: Key findings from data collected for the 2020-21 academic fiscal year for U.S. higher education institutions,*" by A. E. Kaplan, 2022, Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) (https://www.case.org/resources/voluntary-support-education-key-findings-2020-21). 2022 by Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). Reprinted with permission.

Figure 4

Voluntary Support by Source as a Percentage of Total Voluntary Support, 1991-2021



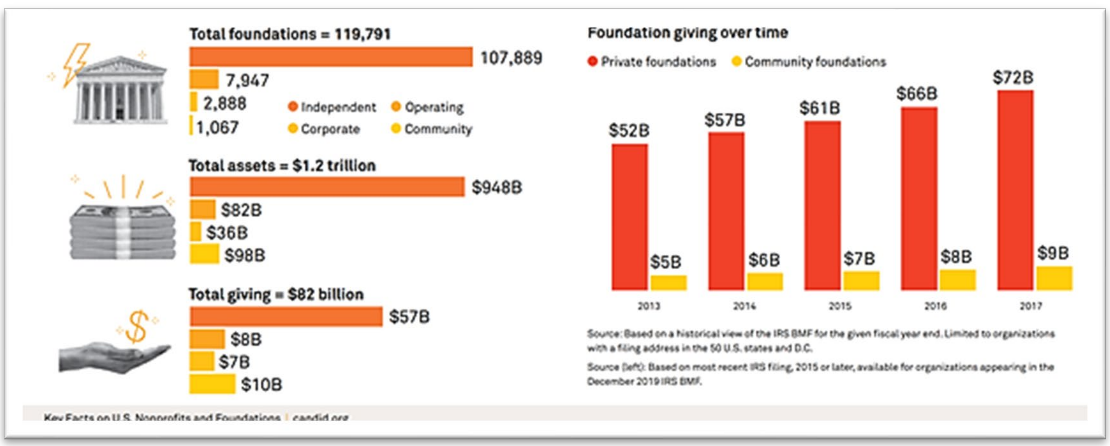
Note. Figure 4 below demonstrates the consistent increase in philanthropic giving compared to other funding sources over the last three decades and shows that philanthropic giving as a percentage continued to increase. From "*Voluntary Support of Education: Key findings from data collected for the 2020-21 academic fiscal year for U.S. higher education institutions,*" by A. E. Kaplan, 2022, Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) (https://www.case.org/resources/voluntary-support-education-key-findings-2020-21). Copyright 2022 by Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). Reprinted with permission.

Foundations operate at the juncture of the government and free-market spheres of these systems and in the gap between ballots and profits (Brody & Tyler, 2010; Leat et al., 2018; Prewitt, 2006). This noted interlocked connectedness again supports the relevance and importance of understanding the decision-making in these systems. Notably, the inequities in one system manifest in the others in a serialized manner (Ericson, 1990). Education and philanthropy need to work together and having many people with their concomitant ideas around the proverbial table is ideal (Gasman, 2012). Leat et al. (2018) recommended bricolage for foundations, including simultaneous yet diverse methods. Leat et al. further urged that skillful "bricolage demands insight, ingenuity, and a profound understanding of the resources available; in addition to keen observing and listening" (p. 133). Bricolage and GCM are similar in this need.

The 2020 Key Facts on U.S. Nonprofits and Foundations (Candid, 2020) maintains that there are 119,791 total foundations. Figure 5 displays the types of foundations and the total giving of each type.

Figure 5

Types of Foundations



Note. From "*Key Facts on U.S. Nonprofits and Foundations*," by A. Koob, 2020, Candid (https://www.issuelab.org/resources/38265/38265.pdf). CC BY-NC 4.0.

Although foundations support a myriad of causes, including the arts, education, environment, poverty, health, and social justice, the focus of the current study will be on their involvement and funding of higher education community colleges.

Underresourcing of Community Colleges

Higher education has the potential to be the mechanism for achieving the American dream, and many from lower socio-economic backgrounds and people of color have only achieved that dream by attending community colleges. Historically, community colleges aimed to serve the needs of a specific demographic for whom open-access institutions are likely the sole entryway to higher education (Edgecombe, 2019; Toth et al., 2016). Community colleges educate 44% of all undergraduates in the United States, or approximately 10 million students annually (CCRC, 2021; Toth et al., 2016). Others have asserted that most current undergraduates are starting or choosing to continue their higher education at one of the country's community colleges (Deil-Amen, 2020). This is a large contingent of the population and thus impacts a vast portion of society and the nation.

Community colleges serve those from marginalized groups, serve a critical role in higher education, and serve as potential engines of social mobility (CCRC, 2021) and regional economic powerhouses. Keenan (2020) argued that community colleges have been ignored and are deserving of ethical recognition. Community colleges have been devalued, disadvantaged, and assigned the stigmatized position of loser (Clarke & Hamilton, 2018; Edgecombe, 2019) due to disinvesting by society and systemic disparities founded on socioeconomic status and ethnicity (Toth et al., 2016). Marginalized students have been sorted into these institutions with fewer resources and have been robbed of opportunities in their efforts to be educated and, consequently, deprived of increased prosperity in social and fiscal contexts (Garcia, 2018). Sorted groups and the networks to which the groups belong socially are ignored and not factored into society's goals, and the relationship with the common good is then fractured (Keenan, 2020). This forgotten half is a growing problem that disparately impacts society's underclass from achieving the potential accessible with a college degree (Espinosa et al., 2019).

Community colleges face severe challenges in accessing state funds. Little attention has been paid to fiscal equity in funding community colleges (Kolbe & Baker, 2019). Although higher education receives significant investment from philanthropy, community colleges do not receive as much (Philanthropy Roundtable, 2019). Entrenched gaps in diverse leaders and financial support exist throughout the nonprofit sphere (Ford et al., 2021). The ancient question of to whom aid should be provided has been explored by researchers (He et al., 2017; Reid, 2018; White, 2018). Therefore, inquiring about community colleges' specific circumstances was appropriate as an area of study. Historically, funding for community colleges has lagged behind four-year universities (Eddy, 2019). Espinosa et al. (2019) argue that the needs of community college students should be a priority for higher education and the institutions that support them to deal with enduring imbalances in opportunities.

Community college students and the community colleges that serve them are under-resourced. Scutari (2019) refers to community colleges as being “underdogs” and “woefully underfunded,” yet points out that they are serving nearly 50% of undergraduate enrollees (p. 1). This lack of resources exacerbates a challenging and grim situation because these students often need more not fewer resources and support than those attending better resourced universities (Cahalan & Perna, 2015; Espinosa et al., 2019). These needed yet absent or reduced supports include, for example, mental health services, advising, and tutoring (Garcia, 2018). Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018) found that over 50% of community college students were food insecure, and around a third experienced housing instability. Nationally, merely 38% of students attending community college get a degree or certificate (Garcia, 2018). Several suggested reasons for this are revealed in the literature, including institutional factors and open access, often resulting in higher numbers of students draining already scarce or inadequate resources at community colleges (Espinosa et al., 2019). These resource and funding-related factors impact many community colleges’ ability to properly educate and support their students.

Inadequate funding and budget reductions force community colleges to make programmatic cuts. For example, expensive workforce training programs that demand higher resources may be reduced as being too costly to sustain. These programs can include training for welders, plumbers, and construction trades (Grover & Miller, 2018). Fletcher (2018) noted that community colleges were challenged by cuts to state aid when these colleges were attempting to meet the high costs of workforce development programs. Grover and Miller (2018) suggested that inadequate funding was at a crisis level for community colleges and left them vulnerable as community colleges were unable to respond quickly to the needs of the local and regional workforce and economic needs due to these shortages in resources. After surveying job training experts at community colleges around the United States, money was the primary thematic area of critical concern (Grover & Miller, 2018). Based on the data from this study, declining funding and increasing costs were impacting community colleges' ability to compete and grow their services (Grover & Miller, 2018). Although money alone is not a solution to complex problems, money is needed to find and fund solutions.

Offering access and admission to college alone is insufficient, and money and resources are needed to close the opportunity gaps. Current philanthropic funding of community colleges has shifted the focus from access to a success and completion model in the span of a decade (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). Community colleges and their students require supports that will assist them in achieving the dream of a college degree and a robust and valuable education and credentials (Espinosa et al., 2019). Funding matters because research has shown a correlation between success and the money spent on educating a student (Garcia, 2018) and community colleges in particular (The Century Foundation Working Group on Community College Financial Resources, 2019). Edgecombe (2019) points toward the funding shortfall as a factor in community colleges not achieving their desires. Craft and Guy (2019), in their study on the roles of community college boards and community college foundation boards, concluded that reliance on traditional funding sources was misplaced as the needs of the community colleges and the students they serve are complicated and rapidly shifting. Further, community colleges are expected to be responsive to changing community and employment needs on a much shorter timeline than four-year universities, exacerbating the insufficiency of bureaucratic state funding models.

Dowd and Shieh (2013) urge that distributive justice theory inquires about the social processes used to determine distribution. This question becomes what must be true about the recipients to warrant being allotted state funds (Dowd & Shieh, 2013). According to Urban.org, foundations expressed a commitment to supporting and furthering racial equity in early 2021. However, these authors also note the gaps in this field's data prevent the tracking of equity investments by philanthropic entities. The data gaps hinder holding these organizations accountable or closing racially based funding gaps (Ashley & Boyd, 2021). Community colleges serve more than their statistical share of black and marginalized students and fall within the racially based funding gap. Edgecombe (2019) urged community colleges to confront and engage with aggression the inadequate investing in the schools and served students.

Although a significant higher education sector, two-year community colleges have not received major philanthropic investing, unlike many four-year institutions (Craft & Guy, 2019). Li et al. (2018) concluded that policymakers need to focus on fixing the historic lack of equity in determining funds to community colleges, in their study on the community impact of performance-based funding models. Four-year institutions figured out many years before community colleges that public monies and tuition were not consistent with the reality of their challenges (Craft & Guy, 2019). Craft and Guy found that the realities of the current day did not allow for reliance on traditional funding sources. These researchers explored the role of community college boards in exercising vigilance in ensuring resources to accomplish the mission and purpose of community colleges. As funding from public sources continues to decline, it has been observed that private giving is an avenue of possible and necessary financial support for community colleges (Dowd & Shieh, 2013).

Smith et al. (2018) studied community college fundraising as a strategy focused on planned giving. According to Smith et al. (2018), in their study on planned giving efforts by community colleges, it was argued that accessing state funding was an even greater challenge for community colleges and community colleges have to seek out other revenue sources and increase fundraising. The difficulty in competing with the flagship universities for public funding was that community colleges serve what Smith et al. argue, without cite, are primarily "a poor, first-generation, non-politically influential population" (p. 145). In addition, community colleges have not invested in long-term relationships with donors and are thus not positioned as well as four-year colleges in long-term giving (Smith et al., 2018). Only recently have community colleges begun to pursue fundraising. Jenkins et al. (1999) report that numerous community colleges raise non-public money by launching their own foundations.

According to Wilson (2021), community colleges are open access, but opportunities are not equally accessible and are designed to maintain the status quo and further the capitalist economic agenda in America. Wilson (2021) argued that community colleges were never intended to be pathways to allow for entrance into higher social strata or true social mobility. Instead, community colleges were created to provide labor to the marketplace. This alleged institutionalized historic purpose may or may not hold for those foundations committed to funding community colleges. Daunting and multifaceted factors challenge community colleges and their relationship with philanthropic foundations, especially when juxtaposed with other institutions of higher education (Clarke & Hamilton, 2018). Ziskin et al. (2018) argued in their study on performance-based funding of higher education and the related policy discourse that it is necessary to understand the barriers to this funding to address future funding of community colleges. Toth et al. (2016) assert that the negative aspects of such accountability metrics are present in reform-seeking private foundations. In line with this was the notion that social classism, familial assets, and wealth are critical considerations surrounding policies affecting community colleges (Toth et al., 2016). Again, it was worth exploring the decision-making process for philanthropic foundations that choose to fund the community college segment and population. By exploring the decision-making of these philanthropic foundations through the lens of GCM, this researcher hoped to discover how these decision-making processes were formulated and conducted.

Foundation Funding to Community College-Focused IOs

The community college sector teems with an innovative and transformative mindset with the potential to disrupt the status quo, and their diverseness vitalizes the sector (Edgecombe, 2019). In recapping what she saw during her attendance at the "Supporting Exceptional Community Colleges", Sedlak (2019) pointed out that the community colleges at the conference were exceptional in being the exceptions. She stated they were "some of the nation's most innovative colleges, those focused on disrupting the status quo and preparing students for success in education and the workforce" (p. 1). A focus on agile, innovative, and strategic funding was being realized in important shifts in how philanthropic foundations choose to use their funds for advocacy and achieving maximum impact and dramatic outcomes. Leat et al. (2018) also share that the large foundations are steering away from the support of single organizations and toward field-level systems change. Innovative foundations hedge their risks by diversifying and tapping multiple knowledgeable and expert resources. Foundations engaged in supplementing instead of supplanting resources recognize that they may be too far removed from the complex problem to be rapidly responsive to challenges (Lynn et al., 2021). Notions of supplement not supplant, adapt and not abdicate expanded in the face of the disruption and opportunities COVID-19 fostered.

Forde (2019) found that increasingly foundations are focusing their resources on intermediary organizations that operate in the policy sphere across multiple institutions. The trend of supporting intermediary entities was an important area that has been understudied in the higher education and philanthropy literature (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). Leat et al. (2018) noted that policy-focused grantmaking could have a bearing on a greater number of beneficiaries and for lengthier periods. Likewise, Haddad (2021) found a sense among foundations that by collaborating with intermediary organizations, the foundation's strategic projects impacted multiple recipients. Many philanthropic institutions now fund intermediary organizations rather than individual community colleges.

Funding collaborative entities that support multiple community colleges is a notable trend for philanthropic foundations (Gose, 2013). In addition, older foundations are claimed to be following this trend of not funding individual colleges and preferring these intermediaries, resulting in a convergence of strategies (Haddad, 2021). Other foundations are following the patterns and practices of the Gates Foundation by moving the focus of funding to intermediaries (Forde, 2019). Haddad and Reckhow (2018) do not offer findings for what drives this trend of older foundations mimicking the strategies for advocacy that the newer foundations implement.

Nonetheless, a Kresge foundation informant in that study pointed out that older foundations intentionally turned to Lumina, a newer foundation, to guide future strategic funding. Older foundations respect the expertise of Lumina as a single-focus foundation and the Gates Foundation for its unmatched size and reach (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018).

Haddad and Reckhow (2018) suggest as older foundations adopt principles and practices of newer foundations, there is a change in the logic of the field of higher education institutions that is influencing the strategy of grantmaking. In line with the trend to impact entire fields and multiple institutions, intermediary organizations congregate multiple institutions and work towards policy and systemic changes. The significant growth in IOs supports the trend. Haddad (2021) found that philanthropic support for capacity building experienced a reduction as reform and systems change received increased support from foundations. The shift to intermediary funding may reflect the next iteration of higher education philanthropy.

In her study investigating the actions of intermediary organizations within philanthropy supporting higher education, Haddad (2021) addressed the grantmaking strategies of foundations in higher education and why these foundations invested in IOs. Intermediary organizations serve as translators between institutional actors within distinct fields with varying perspectives and views but wanting similar outcomes (Gandara et al., 2017). In addition, IOs assist advocacy-driven foundations in accomplishing field-shifting changes (Haddad, 2021).

IOs serve as bridges between higher education and philanthropy and assist with resource interfacing (Haddad, 2021). Ness (2010) also suggested that IOs exist in the interstitial space between policy and research. As a result, philanthropy shifts resources from individual recipients toward IOs (Haddad, 2021). Funding IOs offers several benefits over direct funding, including sustained and intimate relationships with foundations and grantees (Benjamin, 2010). Many of the largest foundations are shifting to support, incubate, mobilize, and even launch their own created intermediary organizations (Haddad, 2021).

The most well-funded of these IOs focused on community colleges at the national level include Achieving the Dream (AtD), created by the Lumina Foundation and the American Association of Community Colleges. Achieving the Dream and the AACC are the two most prominent and recognized IOs serving community colleges. AtD, created by Lumina, considers itself a reform organization focused on college completion. AACC represents nearly all community colleges in the country and is the primary agent for advocating for the needs of community colleges. Both advocacy IOs received funding from Gates, Lumina, Kresge, and Kellogg (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). These IOs have been effective in their missions and amplify the voices of the funding foundations in the community college space (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). The Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, housed at N.C. State University, was founded in June 2018 and receives the majority of its funding from the John M. Belk Endowment. Horn (2021) shared that the Strada Education Network, another innovative IO, deemed a new breed of social impact organizations, seeks to find the answers to inextricable and deep-rooted challenges.

Although it is well settled that philanthropy influences higher education (Haddad, 2021), there is a monumental shift in what the impact should be targeting and how that impact is effectuated. IOs assist advocacy-driven foundations in accomplishing field-shifting changes (Haddad, 2021). The larger influence of IOs across states, regions, and multiple members of a field offers a unique ability conveying the narrative of their tasks and going deeper (Haddad, 2021). Some concern arises when foundations only fund the IOs they launch or have a large footprint. Haddad and Reckhow (2018) noted that other voices outside of favored IOs might not be able to get a seat at this table and thus not have their voices heard.

Reckhow and Snyder (2014), in their study on patterns of funding by modern foundations, described a reduction between 2000 and 2010 in direct funding to higher education institutions and an increase in funding by philanthropic foundations to groups focused on advocacy. Moreover, this increased funding is happening nationwide (Haddad, 2021). Participants in Haddad's (2021) study noted the paramountcy of IOs in foundation advocacy endeavors. Finally, a study of grant data by Haddad and Reckhow (2018) revealed an increasing portion of philanthropic foundation budgets being earmarked for advocation.

Foundation staff asserted the importance of IOs in accomplishing the foundation's purposes and strategic plans (Haddad, 2021). IOs also offer funding foundations the ability to roll out and experiment with reform ideas prior to scaling these ideas up to the larger field (Haddad, 2021). Foundations advance and fund intermediary organizations engaged in reforming education at ever greater amounts (Haddad, 2021). Foundations see IOs as allies in transforming into practice what studies reveal (Haddad, 2021). Further, the support of IOs reveals disdain for purely academic research and a concomitant lack of funding for this non-practical, non-reform research by foundations (Haddad, 2021). Haddad and Reckhow (2018) found that foundations view research as a tool to inform policy and that these foundations pay for and commission the studies directly and through outside organizations. Research seeking to improve higher education and advise the policy conversation in the field serves as another arm of influence for higher education philanthropic foundations (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018).

With the assistance of IOs, philanthropists have been able to influence the reorganization of the goals of higher education, disseminating research that is policy focused and aligned with leading stakeholders (Haddad, 2021). Haddad (2021) also found that innovative grants focused on modeling reforms and diffusing suggested best practices among multiple colleges and universities. In recent years, the philanthropic sector has evolved into an institution focused on social fairness, advancing theories of social change, and eager to scale up favorable outcomes to national policies (Ealy, 2014).

Collaborating among different fields and cross-institutionally allows policy and practice influence across multiple social sectors (Haddad, 2021). Walden et al. (2015) urged foundation funders to leverage their money to bring about systemic transformation by impacting policy and fostering and incubating new ideas. Given the small percentage of higher education funding from foundations compared to governmental entities, their influence was argued to come more from their power to impart status and to magnify select higher education policy viewpoints (Haddad, 2021). The convergence of the higher education philanthropic field around high-leverage strategic decisions increases this influence.

One of the driving factors around this focus on policy and away from building capacity includes a concern around shortages in labor (Haddad, 2021; Philanthropy Roundtable, 2019). Macroeconomically, community colleges, and vocational training sites are needed to answer the call for trained employees to stem the shortage of skilled workers (Scutari, 2019). The critical role of community colleges in meeting the past projected and currently realized labor shortages was reflected in the grantmaking efforts of foundations and their counterpart IOs. Accordingly, for purposes of this study, grantmaking to community colleges and community college-focused organizations will be considered synonymous when considering the processes and strategies foundations use to decide on funding grants to community colleges and community college-focused IOs.

Philanthropy and Higher Education

Philanthropy, historically and currently, involves itself significantly in higher education. Generous endowments from philanthropic sources have notably influenced higher education institutions in the United States (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). Drezner (2011) asserted it would be truer in the future that the most significant power in the rise of contemporary higher education would continue to be foundation contributions. Modern American colleges and universities owe their existence as we find them today to philanthropy. Philanthropic foundations linked themselves to universities centuries ago and continue to do so today through transformational gifts geared to improving knowledge in many fields (Prewitt, 2006). According to the CEO of a college comparison company gathering endowment data, “[a] large endowment often means that the institution can provide more financial aid, can invest more in great faculty and facilities, and can establish unique experiential programs and initiatives, all of which work to support student success" (Fish, 2021, p. 1). The ability to recruit top faculty and future high-level alums results from these considerable resources from philanthropic largess (Harvey et al., 2019).

Candid’s (2021) data revealed that seven of the top ten grantees were elite higher education institutions. Harvard, Yale, and Stanford have the largest endowments in higher education at $53.2 billion (Glenn & Dolan-Wilson, 2022), $30 billion, and $28 billion, respectively (Fish, 2021). These exemplary universities are top-tier private research universities. There was only one public university on the Fish (2021) listing of the top 30 endowed universities, the University of Pittsburgh, with an endowment of $4.3 billion. U.S. News reported, a month after the Fish report was published, that endowments ranged from a low of $11.3 billion to a high of $41.9 billion for these top 10 endowed universities: Harvard University (MA), Yale University (CT), Stanford University (CA), Princeton University (NJ), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Pennsylvania, Texas A&M University, University of Notre Dame (IN), University of Michigan—Ann Arbor, and Columbia University (NY) (Moody, 2021).

There are no community colleges on this endowment list. No community college has ever received a single donation of nine-figures (Arnim, 2021). Although no community college has these transformative, large endowments, they are beginning to seek philanthropic funding and creating foundations to receive and facilitate large philanthropic grants and gifts. According to Klingaman and Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2012), the need for community colleges to create their own 501(c)(3) foundations was shown in the literature. The need for fundraising for community colleges has been deemed urgent, and philanthropy can no longer be ignored by community colleges, given philanthropy's potential relative to the elevation and sustainment of institutional advancement (Craft & Guy, 2019). Community college administrators must recognize the significance of foundations in establishing or enhancing their institution's reputation in the eyes of prospective donors in order to compete with four-year universities (Arnim, 2021). According to Arnim's interview of Green (2019), the CEO of the Santa Barbara City College Foundation and board member of the Network of California Community College Foundations, Green shared:

> "The Ivies figured this out 100 years ago," [Green] says. "The big four-year colleges developed their fund-raising in the last 20 to 30 years. For community colleges, it's more like last Tuesday."

Mangold (2019) encouraged American foundations to expedite their shift in thinking to fund the riskier, seemingly unlikely, public higher education institutions. Foundation policies and practices focused on closing gaps in equity are increasing (Kelly & Lugo, 2017). In addition, there are philanthropic foundations funding community colleges and helping provide these resources and support that Fish noted assist these generously endowed institutions in performing at higher levels.

Strategic and Advocacy Philanthropy

Many labels describe modern philanthropy, including scientific, traditional, industrial, strategic, high impact, entrepreneurial, creative, pragmatic, and venture (Jung, 2020). It was suggested that this new 'new' philanthropy elevates the market and innovation as its' primary focus and has rendered traditional philanthropy an anachronism (Manning et al., 2020). Chia (2015) defines strategic philanthropy as follows:

> Strategic philanthropy is values-based and goal-oriented, implements strategic plans, tracks progress, and evaluates outcomes. Instead of merely making singular grants, strategic philanthropists seek greater impact by taking an approach that is guided by particular values and aims. This approach is goal oriented: philanthropists devise strategic plans to attain specific goals and systems that track progress and evaluate outcomes (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Often, strategic philanthropists commit themselves to the responsibility (and assume the risks) of designing and running their own philanthropic programs while keeping their strategic goals in mind. The key characteristics of strategic philanthropy are: clear goals and key performance indicators, direct oversight and governance, and sharing of skills, abilities, and experience, as opposed to monetary gift giving. (p. 6)

For example, philanthrocapitalism is philanthropy that does philanthropy similarly to how capitalistic business is done but for the good (McGoey & Thiel, 2018). Created as a reaction to venture philanthropy, strategic philanthropy attempted to address many of the criticisms of venture philanthropy (Toepler, 2022). Strategic philanthropy, philanthrocapitalism, new 'new' philanthropy, impact investing, shared values, data, entrepreneurial, disruptive, and "Bill" anthropy are names for similar forms of what is considered the new impactful and strategic philanthropy, in contrast to traditional philanthropy (Fendler, 2018; Kubíčková, 2018; Manning et al., 2020; Walden et al., 2015). These new theories of philanthropy hail from the business and market fields and have obscured delineations of grantmaking for investing as opposed to justice (Terway, 2019). The motives of new philanthropy warrant exploration and academic study (Kubíčková, 2018).

Toepler (2022) claims that strategic philanthropy failed to remedy the complaints against venture philanthropy and resulted in even more criticisms. The complex issues foundations address and the interdependence of societal institutions hinder simple attempts to solve or address these problems (Toepler, 2022). To address complex issues, leaders in the nonprofit sector must increase the complexity of their thinking and judiciously evaluate how they approach the issue and its answer (Jones, 2018).

Although industrial-age foundations laid the groundwork for modern foundations and entrepreneurial philanthropy, there has been a consistent move away from simply being charitable gifters toward institutions seeking to discover the causes and solve the roots of wicked problems in a curative posture (Ellsworth & Lumarda, 2003; Harvey et al., 2019; Prewitt, 2006). Advocacy philanthropy employs "high-leverage, policy-focused strategy" (Haddad, 2021, p. 897). This modernistic approach to grantmaking involves planning and controlling consistent grants (Leat et al., 2018). Modern foundations, such as Gates and Lumina, practice this type of philanthropy (Haddad, 2021). In 2017, philanthropic foundations increasingly engaged in impactful investing strategies (Brakman Reiser, 2017).

According to Haddad and Reckhow (2018), newer foundations, such as Gates and Lumina, leverage their grantmaking for advocating and engaging in policy. Advocacy-focused philanthropic foundations seek influence through funding, metrics, and goals (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). In addition, foundations use data to evidence results and advise on efforts (Bixler et al., 2018). The effect of private philanthropical investments and involvement with colleges and universities has also been referred to as the Gates Effect (Clarke & Hamilton, 2018, p. 44). The Gates Effect and similar movements focus on short-term and measurable returns in solving systemic, historic inequalities. The significant dollar amounts gifted by philanthropy are notable, and attention-getting yet have been asserted to possibly compromise community colleges' ability to achieve goals of democracy (Clarke & Hamilton, 2018). According to Katz (2012), strategic philanthropy targets funding to outcomes on a shortened timeline. Although strategic philanthropy still serves a purpose in simple and complicated issues (Kania et al., 2014), other forms of philanthropy are needed to address wicked, complex problems and situations.

Emergent Philanthropy and Strategy

Strategic philanthropy fails to adequately address the complex nature of societal realities (Kania et al., 2014). Furthermore, Leat et al. (2018) asserted that rationality is not well-suited for complex problems. Lynn et al. (2021) argue that strategic philanthropy is not responsive to complex dilemmas. The nature of emergent strategy's nuance fits complex problems better (Kania et al., 2014). Emergent strategy and economic and behavioral studies inform the less than logical elements of psychology that rule human behaviors (Kania et al., 2014). Funders are often misled by the forced simplicity of logic models and overlook the dynamic complexity of relationship between nonprofit, for-profit, and government entities that affect real-life outcomes (Kania et al., 2014). The interconnectedness of influential components results in an unaligned dynamism of wicked and complex quandaries (Kania et al., 2014).

As institutions experiencing the vagaries of societal evaluations, philanthropic foundation strategizing and missions are subject to shifting and changing (Irvin & Kavvas, 2020). According to Elson et al. (2020), social change entities' implementation of adaptive and emergent strategies is increasingly being mentioned in the sectoral literature as a rising idea. Emergent philanthropy leverages the might of financial resources to supplement organizational networks (Lynn et al., 2021). Emergent philanthropy makes decisions in concert with thought partners rather than for the thought partner and sometimes relinquishes resource control and has field leaders to direct recipients. Emergent philanthropic strategy aligns with IOs. Emergent philanthropy accepts that some actions to be taken reside beyond the decisions made by the funder (Lynn et al., 2021).

GCM theory aligns with emergent and adaptive strategy and decision-making because GCM is also messy and challenging. Both emergent philanthropy and GCM relinquish an illusory sense of command (Kania et al., 2014). Jones (2018) argued that the philanthropic decision to give is quite complex, and developmental theories offer some insight into how funders sense-make and decision-make. Emergent thinking indicates the organization is discovering what is practically effective. Some modern foundations explore adaptive strategies to become more agile in addressing rapidly changing circumstances (Snow et al., 2015). Kania et al. proposed that emergent strategy also necessitates continuous environmental sensing to guarantee allocating resources to areas having the highest opportunity. Conceptually, at emergent strategy's core, opportunities are sensed and leveraged with an absence of outcome certainty

(Kania et al, 2014). Sensing also offers a more instinctive comprehension of how the system's many components are adjusting in reaction to unforeseen inputs and external occurrences. Adaptive strategy in philanthropy adopts simultaneous doing and learning, according to Snow et al. (2015). Snow et al. (2015) argued that organizations ‘do’ adaptive strategy versus designing a strategy. Solutions for wicked problems emerge after nonstop judgments have been argued over critically (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Momentum repetitions emerge in complex systems but cannot be predicted (Kania et al., 2014). Currently, according to Kania et al. (2014), foundations efficiently rework networks that already exist and the momentum of those changes. Emergent and adaptive philanthropy represents a progressive approach to systems, networks, and shared power (Lynn et al., 2021). When foundations create networks, they must be mindful of that network's health and capacity to sustain enthusiastic, committed goal pursuit (Lynn et al., 2021).

> Emergent strategy focuses on strengthening the systems and relationships that can generate solutions, rather than constructing the solutions themselves. The ability of the system to adapt and ultimately reach its goals depends on the overall health of the entire system. (Kania et al., 2014, p. 31)

A fit system fosters the intersection of solutions and challenges (Kania et al., 2014).

According to Lynn et al., strategic and emergent philanthropy experienced significant adoption. Notably, so-called wicked or system problems, characterized by a proclivity to intersectionality among multiple elements, often thwart strategies seeking to interrupt and solve them (Meadows & Wright, 2008). Complex, intractable, wicked problems require the adaptable and flexible methods currently found in emergent and adaptive philanthropic entities (Lynn et al., 2021). Lynn et al. (2021) found some internalized processes of foundations acting as barriers and inhibitors to being nimble and adaptive. Lynn et al. did find that emergent philanthropy was responsive to wicked problems but not as much to disruptive occurrences.

Adaptive Philanthropy and Strategy

Emergent philanthropy and the supported networks must be able to innovate and adapt (Lynn et al., 2021). Adaptive philanthropy represents a significant shift in the philanthropic paradigm that shows no sign of abating (Manning et al., 2020). Grantmaking practice and comprehensive strategy must be adaptive and nimble, as philanthropy increasingly focuses on changing systems, being equitable, and achieving influence across generations (Scott & King, 2019). Foundations evolve by adopting a strategy of inquiry targeting adapting to fluctuating situations (Kennedy Leahy et al., 2016). Philanthropy evolved with societal changes in thinking (Lynn et al., 2021). According to the Scott and King (2019) report, adaptive philanthropy includes relationships, fast decision-making, increased focus on learning and less on complying, and a variety of approaches to funding.

Adaptive or emergent philanthropy requires data, trust, technical capacity, and a culture of data (Ditkoff, 2014; Kania et al., 2014). These requirements are needed to properly deal with wicked, intractable issues (Bixler et al., 2018). Scott and King (2019), in the context of the bi-cultural New Zealand landscape, urge 'adaptive philanthropy' of funders. Noting equity and systemic reform, philanthropic organizations operate in diverse and complex spaces and require adaptive tools to respond properly. The New Zealand foundation that commissioned this report also noted dedication to decolonization and respect for indigenous peoples and cultures.

Adaptive philanthropy requires funders to:

> To be responsive and make rapid decisions when needed. Invest in ways that are fit-for-purpose to the issue, opportunity or community need – whether that be

> seed funding or multi-year investments. Work relationally with ngā kaikōkiri (grantees), trust that they know what they need to deliver on their mission and be willing to provide unrestricted funding – including investment in core costs. Prioritise learning at every opportunity, to support adaptation and increased long-term impact. (Scott & King, 2019, p. 5)

Proponents of adaptive philanthropy do recognize that it is not the solution for all situations. Leat et al. (2018) warn that for a certain quantity of grantmaking it may not be feasible to implement an adaptive strategy. Nevertheless, they maintain that all grantmakers need to recognize that there could be a variety of results in light of different layered contexts. In addition, foundation focus and recognition of the dynamic character of challenges increased alongside some continued reliance on traditional, methodical approaches (Sands, 2022). Rural, urban, and suburban community colleges may not require or benefit to the same degree from the same strategies or proposed solutions.

Increased collaboration between foundations, IOs, and community colleges is a product of emergent and adaptive philanthropic strategies that recognize and value relationships and networks (Haddad, 2021). In addition, getting to the base reason of intricate and nuanced societal challenges requires foundations to implement adaptive and emergent philanthropy in strategy and grantmaking decision-making (Elson et al., 2020).

Grantmaking Decision-Making By Philanthropic Foundations

Decision-making is the core work of organizations and leadership teams. There was a trend in the research to explore both theoretical and practical implementations of strategy and decision-making (Boesso et al., 2017; Celep et al., 2016; Scherer, 2017). As foundations move away from simply writing checks to being openly policy and results-driven, the process of establishing these strategies calls for an understanding of decision-making in these spaces.

Strategy is the heart of how philanthropic foundation leadership teams share and pursue their mission and vision. Elson et al. (2020) found a principled approach to making decisions essential to maneuvering through the subtleties and coiled intricacies of synergistic interactions. However, the decision-making literature and GCM, in particular, contradict this. Instead, GCM posits that the streams enter and exit, and decisions arise based on the interactions of the streams. Who and what is in 'need' is a question that is difficult to answer and often not fully explored. We are seeing this shift in philanthropic foundations' practices through emergent and adaptive strategies. The nonprofit sector (including donors) must shift from short-term remedies to longitudinal, comprehensive, and multidimensional methods in order to address wicked challenges (Jones, 2018).

According to Inside Philanthropy's Explainer, foundations make grantmaking decisions in a variety of ways. Inside Philanthropy asserts that the board of trustees decides after the staff makes recommendations. Smaller foundations may have a small or nonexistent staff, and the board may perform background research itself and then decide. In addition, the board may perform no research or review and decide impulsively (Inside Philanthropy, 2022).

The board's involvement and staff's authority to decide vary from foundation to foundation. Processes also vary from detailed applications to simple methods often used by smaller foundations (Inside Philanthropy, 2022).

Figure 6

The Typical Steps in the Traditional Grantmaking Process

Expression of interest → Dialogue/Advice → Administrator/project Committee Review → Invite to Submit → Site Visit → Full Application → Administrator assess/rank → Board/Trustees for approval

Note. From "The Impossibility of Philanthropic Funding Decisions: The Australian Non-Government Funder Experience," by R. Coyte, J. Rooney, and B. Phua, 2013, *Financial Accountability & Management, 29*(4), p. 405 (https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12020). Copyright 2013 by John Wiley & Sons Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

Even under rational or traditional models, decisions are not made in a vacuum. Benjamin (2010) claimed that funding decisions entail consideration of reputation, belief, and relationship. Rational thinking around grantmaking attempts a knowing prediction and creation of what is going to happen next, despite the conditions in which foundations operate being unpredictable and frequently changing (Leat et al., 2018). In their study on Australian foundations, Coyte et al. (2013) found that respondents wished to reduce subjectivity through the application of more accurate and uniform standards. However, much doubt infiltrated how to achieve this. These participants also noted extremely nonobjective character of the decisions on allocating grants (Coyte et al., 2013). The process was described as quirky and involved juggling and blending.

A dilemma confronts foundations (Coyte et al., 2013). They make the funding choices and they must assess performance, resulting in an asymmetry within the power dynamic (Coyte et al., 2013). Haddad (2021) argues that foundations are powerful, instigating architects of strategic behaviors and system change, not detached funding sources. Representatives from the interviewed foundations in Coyte et al.'s study revealed two interrelated considerations in the decision-making. The first was the necessity to account for grantmaking choices and the influence of their status in the charitable hierarchy (Coyte et al., 2013). These foundation decision-makers, also referred to as philanthropoids, looked to empirically rationalize their grantmaking given the unattainable goal of evaluating the respective strengths of the many applications being considered (Coyte et al., 2013). In addition, there was a desire to mediate the impact of the asymmetrical power dynamic between the funder and the funded (Coyte et al., 2013). Coyte et al. observed the grantmaking decision-making involved carefulness and much consideration. One of the major complaints about philanthropy is the imbalance in power and the ability of foundations to change the world absent any oversight (McGoey & Thiel, 2018). The assertion of care and concern is intriguing because Australia has no legal requirement to moderate the power imbalance (Coyte et al., 2013).

Similarly, there is no such requirement in the USA, apart from tax reporting or the foundation's charter. Fleishman (2007) argues that “foundations, after all, are among our most powerful, least accountable, and significantly tax-benefitted institutions, so it is all the more unacceptable that they are among our least understood institutions” (p. 2). One of the major complaints about philanthropy is the imbalance in power and the ability of foundations to change the world absent any oversight (McGoey & Thiel, 2018). Participants in the Coyte et al. (2013) study explicitly stated they aimed to balance risks and rewards when assessing grants. The foundations used a multi-step evaluation procedure in deciding on approving applied for grants (Coyte et al., 2013). Several comments were made regarding the arbitrary and contradictory nature of the decision-making process. However, foundation members felt personally proud of their ability to make educated investments in activities deemed risky by other donors (Coyte et al., 2013). Coyte et al. (2013) interpreted the interview data to reveal that these actors acted intuitively. Intuition aligns with the GCM’s fluidity and realistic human behavior claims.

Granting choices are extremely nonobjective and susceptible to influence by the most powerful backers, commonly the foundation's creator (Coyte et al., 2013). As donors die or delegate decision-making power to others, these others carry out the work and mission of the foundation. Philanthropoids execute the mission of the donor (Forde, 2019). First referred to as philanthropoids by Curti and Nash (1965), the decision-making processes of philanthropoids on behalf of foundations have not been thoroughly studied. Foundation CEOs' perceptions of the social impact significance of their decisions and strategies have been explored in few studies (Ricciuti & Calò, 2018). In their study on mission change in family foundations, Irvin and Kavvas (2020) suggested that founders possessed unspoken confidence in future decision-makers to adjust missions to current circumstances and present needs experienced in society. These pivoting and shifting strategies have also been attributed to leadership changes and the board's evolving viewpoints (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). The 'how' of how this happens is unknown.

Awareness of the difficulty of comprehensive knowledge or fully transparent decision-making was present (Coyte et al., 2013). That awareness parallels critiques of rational theory. Harrow (2016) found that philanthropic accountability might be increased with more open funding and decision-making and suggested research on the involvement of professionalizing philanthropy in its decision-making preferences. Payne et al. (2019) argued that when there is the claim of serving the public good there is a higher standard. Interviewed participants have also recognized that achieving the philanthropic foundation's objectives involves disparate paths (Coyte et al., 2013). This observation may support the use of the GCM in exploring these processes and paths. GCM and its applicability to organized anarchies would appear to fit the description shared by these foundation participants' interview statements.

There are many studies on philanthropy's involvement in the K-12 and four-year higher education spaces (Au & Lubienski, 2016; Fendler, 2018; Kolleck, 2019). However, there was much less research on the involvement of philanthropic foundations in the two-year community college arena. The data in the literature indicates that there was a significant need and that additional funding sources and resources can make a difference in the outcomes for community colleges. Unfortunately, research on the continuity of these inequities in higher education has not received nearly the same attention (Garcia, 2018). The studies that have examined four-year university success in garnering funds focused on selectivity, affluence, standardized test scores, and other factors (Gaskin, 2014). These criteria are much less applicable to community colleges and therefore provide less guidance on obtaining this philanthropic funding for this sector of higher education.

Decision-making acts as a strategy when foundations purposefully or inadvertently decide not to fund riskier pursuits. Philanthropy is notably risk-averse (Ranghelli, 2018). Foundation informants shared their preference for funding established, private, elite research institutions over what they perceived to be riskier, small, less conventional public institutions (Mangold, 2019). Fleishman (2007), in his seminal book on foundations, describes failing as an imprecise concept. Foundations can also fear failure more than they desire success. Innovation for foundations involves temporal and fiscal risks and higher than usual rates of failure (Leat et al., 2018). Disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, mandate future-focused thoughts and imagination as opposed to relying on previously held ideas on how to achieve influence (Lynn et al., 2021). Mangold (2019) in comparing foundations in Germany and the USA found:

> Foundations in both countries adopt a rather risk-averse stance. Not only should promising ideas be supported and pursued, but also more risky ones. Instead of funding more of the same, a more hazardous funding behavior could stimulate, for example, potential reform processes. Foundations could improve their role as advocates for certain issues in higher education. If research really is venturesome, then foundations should also

grant the "possibility of failure," meaning that research should also be allowed to bring out new negative discoveries. (p. 203)

The past and current disorder created by the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how philanthropic foundations strategize and make decisions around grantmaking. Leat et al. (2018) asserted an abundance of grantmaking to be overly rational and overly specified. In response, Leat et al. (2018) propose novel grantmaking tenets to apply in modern societies' chaotic realm. Adaptive philanthropy’s streamlined processes, response-focused policy, preemptive relationship-building, and implementing behaviors, with the courage to target possibility over the fear of uncertainty, support increased decision-making speed (Scott & King, 2019). A provocative finding of Lynn et al. (2021) included that several funders struggled with finding meaning outside of a grantmaking function, particularly as the pertinence of rigidly regulated strategic concepts were abandoned in the age of COVID-19 (Lynn et al., 2021).

Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Trends in Strategies and Decision-Making

COVID-19 impacted education at the community college level. The pandemic showed higher education and foundations the need to be adaptive and flexible. Institutions pivoted on extremely short timelines to address the repercussions of the pandemic on education delivery. No established budget or planned funding existed to handle this pandemic. Federal and state monies for the pandemic were late in coming and also were restricted and limited in use. Needs and solutions evolved at a rapid pace. By removing constraints on financing and enabling grantees to reroute funds, foundations increased grantmaking flexibility in view of COVID-19 (Dalberg Advisors, 2020). Philanthropic foundations can quickly respond and work with grantees to provide learning assistance, strategic planning, and indirect investments in long-term supports. Unlike other sectors, philanthropy, due to its unique position, has the ability to deal with disruptive times absent imposed directives and constraints (Reichenbach et al., 2021). As intermediary organizations, community foundations, operating in equity, mobilize change that private philanthropic foundations cannot, including political action (Mumford et al., 2022). Intermediary organizations guided the speedy provision of financial supports mandated by the pandemic (Paarlberg et al., 2020).

Mumford et al. (2022) argued that community foundations, as intermediary organizations, transcend conventional grantmaking by convening disparate participants and catalyzing intersectoral answers to societal problems. The subject of the Mumford et al. study, the New Orleans Community Foundation, created a networked community focused on learning how to react to catastrophes equitably. Further, that foundation recognized and realized the necessity of strategy to respond to emergent disasters. The leadership team identified comprehensive guidelines and procedures to address disasters with a required, flexible approach. The framework of dealing with disasters such as hurricanes translated into dealing with the pandemic. Disruption from the pandemic presented opportunities, and diverse networks, such as IOs, can react faster to these challenges (Lynn et al., 2021).

Liadsky et al. (2021) contend that strategic principles of disaster response frameworks limited the lack of certainty the pandemic wrought. Lynn et al. (2021) examined the disruptive impact of COVID-19 on the grantmaking strategies of foundations and how foundations could devise these strategies. According to Lynn et al. (2021), disruptive events require the ability to move beyond transactional thinking and adaptive strategies. These authors assert a need for transformative strategy, inclusive of, yet surpassing adaptive strategy. Reichenbach et al. (2021) described the study subject foundation, Humanity United, dealing with the pandemic as a "journey of adaptation" (p. 30). Further, the informants stated that COVID-19 upset longitudinal, strategic planning as these plans could not handle the issues created by the pandemic or the concurrent racial injustice movement. Lynn et al. (2021) coined a strategy as resilient when it enables collective grantees to accomplish longitudinal goals despite considerable contextual upheaval.

Lynn et al. urged an expansion of emergent philanthropy to include a formulaic strategy paradigm that facilitates quick and iterative cycles of attaining knowledge and evolving. Resilient strategies, combined with a mutually envisioned focalization on confronting a complicated, systemic issue, necessitate corresponding abilities from diverse partners in order to confront and react to disruptive factors (Lynn et al., 2021). Even before the pandemic, social systems called for structures having an awareness of complexity (Reichenbach et al., 2021). According to Lynn et al., resilience involves networking in tandem to rise above simply surviving a disruption but to bounding ahead. According to Reichenbach et al. (2021), the Humanity United foundation similarly found itself seeking to bounce forward and be resilient as a result of COVID-19 and the resulting social and racial justice protests after the murder of George Floyd. Horn (2021) described the Strada Network as "peering around corners" to forecast what was coming (p. 3). The pandemic provides an opportunity to shift the status quo for foundations that choose to take the chance (Mumford et al., 2022). Reichenbach et al. (2021) asserted that the pandemic uncovered the dissonance between strategic philanthropic practices and the fast-paced changes experienced in complex systems. Further, they postulated that disruptions might be needed to learn, grow, and clear a path for something new and improved. Forecasting the next disruption in the chaotic and complex current societal realities may be impacting the decision-making on grantmaking by foundations.

Summary

Very few organizational leaders can offer a salient articulation of why they do what they do and that they struggle to state their purpose for existing (Sinek, 2009). Like many other nonprofit organizations, foundations do not possess techniques that allow for easily verifying their effectiveness (Leblebici et al., 1991). Philanthropic foundations possess significant resources and endowments and are only required to spend 5 percent of this yearly under the tax laws (Reich, 2018). Emergent, adaptive, transformational, resilient strategies represent philanthropic foundations reacting to the sharing of power and collaborating around the equity and social reform work they seek to accomplish (Lynn et al., 2021). Ranghelli et al. (2018) put forth several proper power-wielding actions for philanthropic foundations:

> They convene grantees and community stakeholders while also playing a supportive participant role at other convening tables. They organize and collaborate with philanthropic peers that share common concerns, and with other sectors such as government. They inform, raise awareness and advocate by using reputation and expertise to bring visibility to critical issues and amplify the voices of the most marginalized. They deploy nongrant financial assets creatively to advance foundation and grantee goals and shift resources and power to underinvested communities. (p. 47-49)

Given the opacity surrounding philanthropic foundations, all that can be known for certain was that Gates Foundation is the largest foundation by assets (Grant, 2016). Returning to rationality, the literature reveals multiple intertwined systems when exploring how resources are dispersed and who benefits and suffers from this allocation (Dowd & Shieh, 2013). When community colleges are ignored, they, their students, and the communities they serve do not experience equity or respect. It seems difficult to defend the funding gap between large, public universities that educate primarily more affluent students and community colleges that serve marginalized and historically disenfranchised students (Kahlenberg, 2015). There was a gap in the literature on philanthropic funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs. In addition, little was known about how private foundations process their funding decision-making, creating a gap in the literature. This researcher will explore the decision-making processes in a foundation's funding strategies related to community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Using the garbage can model of organizational choice theory, this research will strive to understand the sense-making of the decision-makers in philanthropic foundations. There was scant existing research addressing how influencing factors intersect with philanthropic sense-making of the actual problem to be solved or the solving of the problem. In addition, this research also aims to identify the various processes philanthropic foundations implement when engaging in grant-making decision-making. The practical import was that community colleges need to understand the decision-making to access these resources for their institutions and students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this single case study was to discover and understand how a philanthropic foundation decided to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs by exploring the decision-making process of the philanthropic foundation. A case study approach was used to discern a deeper understanding of the processes of philanthropic foundation decision-making and the influences involved in the funding of community colleges and community college-focused IOs. This study was based on the garbage can model of organizational decision-making. Chapter Three outlined the research design, including the research questions, setting and participants, assumptions and interpretive frameworks, the researcher's positionality and role, detailed procedures, and data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded by addressing the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

To discover and understand the decision-making processes of a philanthropic foundation when deciding to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs, a qualitative exploratory, holistic, single-case study was most appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore the phenomena in-depth in a real-life setting (Yin, 2018). The purpose of any research study is to add to the body of knowledge on the stated topic of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The qualitative design allowed the researcher to explore the perceptions and experiences of a specific population of philanthropoids, leaders, decision-makers, and foundation and intermediary organization insiders around decision-making processes. Qualitative researchers seek to analyze and understand patterns of behavior and societal processes (Given, 2008). The goal was to understand an aspect of the human condition through empirical study.

Qualitative study researchers concern themselves with interpreting, understanding, experiencing, and representing the methods and processes of the societal realm (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research studies have evolved into sites requesting vital dialogues on the democratic system, ethnicity, gendered identities, social status, liberty, and the communal space (Given, 2008). Qualitative research intends to explore social situations and phenomena holistically and constructively (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative researchers want to generate, within a particular context, a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the phenomena built upon abundant, refined, and descriptive information (Mason, 2002). Mason (2002) suggests that qualitative researchers utilize data generating methods that are malleable, cognizant of the societal environment producing the data, and not removed from the real world. The goal and objective of qualitative research is, in general, focusing on an extraction and interpretation of the meaning of experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Merriam, 1998, 2009). The aims and underpinned qualitative goals are in contrast to quantitative research methods.

The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the stated problem was worthy of being studied, and a flexible style was appropriate (Yin, 2018). In addition, an understanding of contexts was warranted, the problem did not fit quantitative measures, and a detailed understanding was called for (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By using a case study design, a researcher can search for the occurrence of trends and themes within a social context and construct that may be obscured or invisible when using quantitative design (Yin, 2018).

In addition, an understanding of contexts was warranted. Creswell and Poth (2018) define qualitative research as research that focuses on the meaning of a social concern as perceived by a person or group of people and explores that problem through research informed by an interpretive or theoretical framework. The phenomenon was explored within its context and specifically due to its relationship to the surrounding environment (Rashid et al., 2019). Further, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) assert that authentically capturing people's lived experiences as a primary emphasis for much qualitative research.

Although enrolling over 40% of American undergraduates (Guth, 2020), community colleges receive 2% of higher education funding from philanthropic organizations. Community colleges receive between 2% and 6% of philanthropic foundation grants to higher education institutions (Christophersen et al., 2019; 2020; Drummer & Marshburn, 2014; Klingaman & Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 2012). The phenomena around how and why some philanthropic foundations decided to exceed 2% to 6% funding level to community colleges considering the proportion of undergraduates attending these institutions was worthy of study. Scutari (2019) advised that although alumni offer increased funding for low socioeconomic students at four-year schools, more and more donors are urging that their beneficence's financial impact would have a more significant, outsized, transformative effect at HBCUs, vocational schools, and community colleges. Community colleges have certainly a stronger and more direct effect on students, according to Arnim (2021). Community colleges are not second-tier institutions. They present funders with a chance to contribute to the workforce of tomorrow through an opportunity for investing (Philanthropy Roundtable, 2019). Community colleges offer students, particularly those in the lowest quarter socioeconomically, an improved opportunity for social motility (Philanthropy Roundtable, 2019). Case studies are appropriate when there is a need to comprehend the intricacies of a societal phenomenon, such as institutional and administrative procedures (Yin, 2018).

In addition, this study was qualitative because it began with assumptions and used interpretive and theoretical frameworks to inform the inquiry into the social phenomena

(Creswell & Poth, 2018) of philanthropic foundation funding to community colleges and the meaning assigned to the values and perceptions surrounding the grantmaking decision-making of philanthropic foundations. This phenomenon was studied in the natural setting of philanthropic foundations. This researcher sought to uncover the perceptions of the participants and the meaning assigned to the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Seeking to understand perceptions and meaning is a hallmark of qualitative design. Further, Yin (2018) advises that answering the research questions and aligning them back to the study's purpose is the goal of a qualitative case study.

The researcher used the qualitative research case study methodology to discover internal and external historical, organizational, institutional, and personal contexts, processes, and factors that supported grantmaking to community colleges by a philanthropic foundation. Case studies are uniquely designed to satisfy queries wanting to understand the complexity of social phenomena (Yin, 2018). Analyzing social processes were first explored using the case study method (Philliber et al., 1980). Moreover, case studies are a common research strategy and qualitative design (Harrison et al., 2017; Meyer, 2001). As this researcher sought to explore the applicability of the GCM to decision-making by a philanthropic foundation, the case study design was the ideal research design.

As Yin (2018) operationalized, the case study design possesses several significant components. First, case study design involves appreciating context and patterns in knowledge attainment (Yin, 2018). The case study method empirically examines present-day phenomena (the 'case') in detail and within the phenomenon's real-world environment, particularly when the borders between phenomenon and setting are not plainly obvious (Yin, 2018). A case study is helped in coping with multiple points of attention that exceed occurrences of data by preemptively developing conceptual tactics to steer the research method, collecting data, analyzing data, and also requires a triangulation of that data (Yin, 2018). Case study research entails the examination of a case within its specific, current environment or position and is geographically and temporally constrained (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). Case study research explores a contemporary phenomenon in the real world as it exists in a bounded system (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) asserts that a case study design is appropriate when exploring processes and phenomena within the world's reality. Case study was also appropriate for exploring the current decision-making processes because it was limited to a single philanthropic foundation and bounded by time and location. In this proposed study, the researcher explored the decision-making processes used by philanthropic foundations around providing funding on behalf of and to community colleges. A goal of this research study was also to discover how and why these decisions were operationalized and the meaning attached to these decisions and processes.

A research design may be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory; case studies, too, can be one of these three (Yin, 2018). As with other qualitative designs, a case study methodology explores an empirical issue by following a predetermined set of methods (Yin, 2018). Case study designs can be one of four designs. Type 1 is a holistic, single-case, Type 2 is a single-case, embedded design, Type 3 is a holistic, multi-case design, and the last is Type 4, the multi-case, embedded design. Although a researcher should elect to use a multi-case case study when possible, the single-case design is the most useful when the phenomenon is unique; the desire is to test an existing theory or a common situation seeking a revelatory or longitudinal purpose (Yin, 2018). There are pros and cons to both single-case and multi-case studies. Yin (2018) asserts that the decision between single-case and multiple-case is the main design distinction for case studies.

The holistic, single-case design was selected for this study. The selection of a holistic single case is ideal when the criteria for multiple-case have not been met. Researchers interested in analyzing the case as closely as possible will find a single case study to be the most fruitful method for narrowing their emphasis to a particular location (Philliber et al., 1980). Single-case studies may contribute to developing knowledge and theory through validating, questioning, or expanding theory (Yin, 2018). Applicability of the garbage can model to philanthropic decision-making related to the funding of community colleges and community college-focused IOs was explored. That purpose further supported the selection of the single-case study design.

The established parameters bound this study. The constraints for the bounded case were an endowed, private philanthropic foundation, making grants to support community college education. As this was a contemporary phenomenon and included interviews and observations, the case study method was preferred (Yin, 2018). An exploratory case study allowed me to target a variety of stakeholders within the philanthropic foundation with influence over the decision-making processes and strategies supporting these decisions. An exploratory case study allowed flexibility and openness to discover and evaluate the perceptions of these various stakeholders. The objective of an exploratory case study is to figure out how or why a phenomenon may be occurring (Yin, 2014). As no researcher had explored the organizational decision-making of philanthropic foundations as organized anarchies, a descriptive case study was not appropriate because that would assume that this assumption is valid and inhibits the opportunity for theory building (Yin, 2014).

Qualitative researchers seek understanding of human experiences and behaviors (Creswell, 2014). Being flexible in design, collecting data, and research analysis is recommended to obtain a deeper comprehension and validity in representing the points-of-view of the participants (Krauss, 2005). An exploratory case study design aims to determine how or why a phenomenon may be occurring (Yin, 2014). Exploratory case studies also offer the opportunity to inquire concerning prominent patterns and thematic categories of significance for members (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Research Questions

The purpose of this single-case case study was to discover and understand how philanthropic foundations decide to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs by exploring the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations. A research study is guided by the research questions of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The central research question and two sub-questions for this study are again set forth below.

Central Research Question

How do decision-makers employed by or serving on the board of a philanthropic foundation decide to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

Sub-Question One

How do philanthropic foundation decision-makers describe the processes to implement funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

Sub-Question Two

How do philanthropic foundation decision-makers describe their strategies in implementing funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

Setting and Participants

Detailed information on the setting and participants was included in this section. The setting and the criteria used for inclusion at organizational and individual levels were described.

The study’s boundaries and sampling methods were explained. Casteel and Bridier (2021) argue that research in the social sciences involves studying institutions, humans, and an array of networked people. The foundation of a social science study and the study design include accurately describing the sample and population as well as the distinguishing aspects, including the analytical and observational unit (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). I examined organizational behavior, so the unit of analysis was the organizational decision-makers.

Site

The site selection at the pseudonymous CCX Foundation (CCX) was chosen for this qualitative single-case, holistic, exploratory case study. Harvey et al. (2019) posit that there is a gap in research on smaller foundations' actions as opposed to the largest, most well-endowed foundations. Modest-sized foundations influence distinct disciplines in the aggregate (Harvey et al., 2019). The dearth of research on the actions of modest-sized foundations was explored in this study. Pursuant to the protocols of research studies, the site and participants were referred to using pseudonyms. I inquired if the entity desired to be non-anonymized (Given, 2008), given the positive work they were conducting and the desire that their processes and decision-making to fund these underfunded entities could result in more funding to community colleges. The first reason this site was selected was to explore the processes that an endowed philanthropic foundation in the United States implemented in its decision-making around community college funding and support. The CCX was selected because of its commitment to supporting innovation and funding to higher education, including community colleges and other community college supporting intermediary organizations.

CCX engaged in several large profile initiatives and collaborative partnerships with community colleges. After a brief review of the website, core values, and missions, this foundation was selected. The mission and website revealed a desire to support education. The foundation was well-endowed and active in issuing grants in the educational space. The CCX indicates it has as a priority of supporting underrepresented students' pursuit of postsecondary education as a path to the workforce.

The second reason the CCX site was selected was the accessibility of the foundation to this researcher. It was well-known that access to philanthropic foundations could be a significant challenge, and obtaining permission to enter into these organizations has been historically difficult. Several researchers have portrayed philanthropic foundation culture as mysterious to those outside, including those seeking funding (Celep et al., 2016; Reid, 2018). Researchers have referred to the grantmaking foundation arena as "terra incognito" (Rigillo et al., 2018, p. 3) and "uncharted territory" (Anheier & Toepler, 2020, p. 414). Other researchers have noted that despite the vital and critical role philanthropy plays in society, it remains a socially and organizationally opaque concept (Christou et al., 2019; Ruwanpura & Hollenbach, 2014). Difficulty accessing philanthropic foundations' inner workings in decision-making and grantmaking contributed to the complexity and trickiness of understanding the problem. Limiting this study to one institution increased the likelihood of gaining permission and fuller access, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the decision-making processes. In addition, building trust through multiple visits and interactions was critical given the known opacity of philanthropic foundations.

Participants

For this qualitative single-case, exploratory, holistic case study, I examined the bounded system of the organizational site, CCX, including the bounded environment of those included in decision-making on providing funding on behalf of community colleges and community college-focused IOs. The target sampling population at each site were those participating in decision-making around funding recipients. Targeting leadership, foundation insiders, and decision-makers provides insight from those that have had experience with and are informed about the phenomena being studied (Etikan et al., 2016).

In this current study, the criteria for qualifying informing participants are that they would have had to have participated in or have influential input into the decision-making process on grant-making involving community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Jones (2018) advised that data collection and analysis offer sufficient information power for a study to explore and generate hypotheses to determine if a theory could provide information on the research question. In this study, the inquiry included whether the GCM offered valuable information on the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations. A minimum number of 10 participants were recruited to participate.

Researcher Positionality

Growing up in rural Missouri, the only higher education I knew of was the local junior college, Jefferson College, affectionately nicknamed 'Jeffco'. No one in my family or community had ever attended any form of higher education. There was a sense of community pride in this junior college. I remembered traveling there for concerts and competitions as a middle and high school student. Jeffco offered so much to me and those in my community. These were people from where I was, and they were learning, sharing, and working hard to succeed. The junior college offered certifications and training that allowed people to rise above the sometimes less fortunate circumstances of their birth in an accessible, affordable, and prompt manner. I had and continue to have a deep affinity and fondness for community and junior colleges.

In my current employment, I had worked with philanthropic foundations in overseeing the grants department; I had seen philanthropic foundations' passion, excitement, desire, and ardor to make a difference, yet occasionally seeming not to know what was needed. When I considered these two major societal and institutional players, I saw two entities that belonged together but, for some reason, had not managed to connect as easily as the other main educational entities, such as K-12 schools and four-year universities.

Interpretive Framework

I operated from the social constructivist viewpoint. My research also reflected a social constructivist belief that reality was constructed through lived experiences and by interacting with others. Interpretation, for the constructivist view, may be considered a vital component in the process of making meaning (Krauss, 2005). Social constructivism involves using an inductive method and gathering information through interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents and texts. In order to do social science research, the researcher must effectively and exhaustively identify and characterize what is being researched (Rahi, 2017).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions consider how the researcher's actions may be guided by the researcher's beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My philosophical assumptions were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. These assumptions influenced the creation of my research problem and the research questions. In addition, assumptions are the beliefs that I held but did not possess supporting evidence for (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). I further reflected on these assumptions in Chapter Five of this study.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption addressed the belief regarding the nature of reality. As a qualitative researcher, I embraced many varied ideas of reality, as do those to be studied and those reading qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was my goal to report these varied perceived realities. Creswell and Poth (2018) advise that the multiplicity of realities is reflected in the themes revealed by the many forms of evidence as shared using the verbatim verbiage of the participants. My ontological assumption facilitated the development of themes in my findings regarding humanity's fallible understandings and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I shared the participant’s opinions and views that aligned and misaligned with my own implicit and explicit biases.

Epistemological Assumption

The belief on what is to be counted as knowledge, how such assertions are defended or supported, and the dynamic between the researched and the researcher is answered by this assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used memoing and considered the participants' stated perceptions, values, and statements as evidence of their reality. These participants' assignment of meaning or meaning-making informed the experienced reality for the individual and the organization. Krauss (2005) asserts that meaning is the most basic component of a social human environment. In addition, meaning is the driving force behind ideas, behaviors, including even knowledge interpretation and application and demands rigor in the analysis of the data (Krauss, 2005).

Axiological Assumption

This assumption explored beliefs around the perception of the function of principles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I acknowledged the intrinsic values in the research, the biases operating within me, and the relationship of these values and biases to the context of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a qualitative researcher, it was appropriate for me to share my values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I agree with the teaching in Scripture that it is better to give than to receive. My values also aligned with service in the manner of Jesus Christ and how His gift of salvation has changed my life, the lives of millions, and the world itself. Accordingly, when I considered how philanthropic foundations decided to give to community colleges, there was a bias that giving was a blessing and built treasures in heaven for the 'cheerful giver.'

As a researcher pursuing qualitative study, my values and the theoretical framework influenced that research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), an axiological research approach is used to establish my positionality in regard to the research's perspective and environment. My worldview was interpretive as I believed that the intertwined reality of philanthropic foundations and community colleges was complex and involved multiple realities.

Researcher's Role

I served and functioned as the primary human instrument in the study (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research demands that the researcher recognize and implement safeguards against the researcher's biases (Yin, 2018). As a first-generation college graduate and a Black woman who grew up in poverty, I am a member of several marginalized demographics and do not have perfect impartiality. I am also married to a white man and have two biracial children, which has resulted in my perceptions and concepts around race and privilege being challenged and even altered. My son was a freshman at a large public, predominantly white research university in the deep south. He left there after one semester and transferred to the local community college. He then moved to another city to attend another community college in this state to continue his education. He has now reenrolled in the private university he attended previously. When starting this study, I had no personal connection to community colleges. Given these developments, I was even more interested in the problem and purpose of this study. I did not have a relationship with any employees or board members at the foundation site. This assisted me in being impartial. I also maintained a journal of my potential biases, fatigue, assumptions, emotions, and intersectionality of my role with the subject and the participants.

One of my biases was that I did not feel that community colleges are treated fairly in society. For example, I studied at the libraries of flagship public research universities. These libraries were beautiful and offered many spaces and resources for studying. Contrarily, neither of the community college libraries in this area were open on the weekends. My son's community college library I the new city was not open on the weekends. The lack of weekend access to safe, quiet, welcoming study spaces was inequity for community college students who may have wanted and needed to study in a home library on the weekends. I also strictly followed all established and created protocols when gathering data.

Stewart (2017) suggests the need for community colleges to understand how foundations operate and make decisions. I agreed with those researchers that recognize that most philanthropy involves private money and organizations. Accordingly, the solution to addressing criticisms is not to 'throw open the books.' Subjecting foundation money to oversight by the state is inappropriate because these monies are not public and would have a profoundly negative impact without legal, policy, or historical support for such interference in the autonomy of foundations (Brody & Tyler, 2010). In addition, Elson et al. (2020) regard foundational autonomy as a great strength and a great weakness. Autonomy allows foundations to be risk-takers but fosters elitist disdain (Elson et al., 2020). Instead, appreciating, exploring, and understanding how philanthropic entities optimize grantmaking decision-making and thinking on funding may allow community colleges to access these resources and work more effectively within the philanthropic space.

Procedures

No research data collection efforts were conducted until Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, site administrative approval (see Appendix E for site approval), and informed consent forms (see Appendix F for informed consent form) were secured. After IRB approval (see Appendix A for IRB approval), I formally contacted the proposed participant site with a letter explaining the purpose of my research and invited them to participate in the case study. I recruited a minimum of ten members of the senior leadership team of the foundation or those involved in guiding or making funding decisions. I used purposive and snowball sampling for participants. Upon receipt of participant site agreement, I emailed the consent forms to the participants for signing and returning to me. Receipt of the signed consent form is required to reflect the participant’s agreement to participate (Creswell, 2013).

I asked the consenting participants to join me for semi-structured individual interviews in their offices or a conference room at the foundation site. I recorded the interviews using two different audio recording devices in the event of a technical issue with recording. I also took notes of nonverbal responses and my observations of the interview setting. Next, I analyzed the data by coding the data. I then used these to discover themes and trends in the data. I then answered the research questions using these revealed patterns, themes, trends, and typifications (Krauss, 2005). Collection and analysis of data was conducted contemporaneously and concurrently.

Permissions

I requested permission from CCX to conduct the study at their site. I then requested access to the decision-makers on funding, including the leadership team and board members. Upon IRB approval, I also contacted the proposed site to determine their current stance on possibly allowing access to their site and the participants for this study.

Recruitment Plan

The sample pool included decision-makers on funding from CCX. The researcher must defend the sample size (Malterud et al., 2016) with reference to the nature, scope, and time to gather the data from the sample participants and the homogeneity of the population being considered (Boddy, 2016). Boddy (2016) argues that any sample larger than 30 is too large as it would be too difficult to allow for in-depth analysis. The sample size in this study was 10. Stake (2006), in his case study methodology, requires a sample population of eight to 14 to be assessed upon achievement of no new insight or information being gained towards comprehending the phenomena or saturation. Saturation is reached when the study includes enough information for the study to be capable of being replicated and the data has both depth, shown by rich, quality data, and breadth, shown by a thick quantity of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Walker, 2012).

Participants were at least 18 years of age. Each participant was provided with the consent form and the opportunity to read the consent form, ask clarifying questions, and express any concerns to the researcher's dissertation Chair and the IRB for Liberty University. It was made clear to each participant that they had the freedom to withdraw this consent at any time.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection in qualitative studies involves several steps, including obtaining permissions, crafting a defensible and successful sampling plan, having reliable means to obtain, record, and securely store the data, and flexibility in gathering and handling the gathered data

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). As this study was a qualitative case study, I carefully considered collecting and analyzing data from the outset. For case study research, Yin (2018) specified six categories of data for collection: interviews, direct observations, participant observation, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts.

Qualitative research uniquely facilitates the process of meaning-making (Krauss, 2005). The purpose of the data collection was to gather descriptive information from the philanthropic foundation leadership on their process of decision-making and funding strategies as they considered providing funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Based on my purpose statement and research questions and to achieve triangulation, the data collection categories for this qualitative single case study included interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Triangulation is the examination of data collected using a variety of sources and assists in corroborating data and reducing bias (Bowen, 2009). Triangulation strives to confirm any revealed themes based on a minimum of three data sources. Triangulation of data allows for discovering patterns, categories, and themes within the data through synthesizing and comparing the varied data sources (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), triangulating the data in qualitative research generates rich and trustworthy data.

Semi-structured, conversational, open-ended interviews are the most important data collection type used in case study research (Yin, 2018). Document analysis and direct observation complemented the narrative, interview data and enhanced the study's credibility (Yin, 2018). These three data sources were triangulated to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data collection. I collected and analyzed the data until I achieved saturation and triangulation of the data. Triangulating the data is one way to achieve and ensure data saturation; saturation and triangulation are intricately connected (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggest that when the status of no new data is achieved, it is likely that there are also no new themes, and at that point, saturation can be said to have been reached. Saturation supports credibility and dependability (Balog, 2016).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) note several strategies for achieving triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, asserting that credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are built upon transparency. Transparency is valued because it is the core of qualitative research method standards (Levitt et al., 2018). Transparency is further valued in the reporting tradition of qualitative research inquiry in collecting and analyzing the data and ensuring procedural ethicality (Levitt et al., 2018). Levitt et al. (2018) found that researchers increase their reports' trustworthiness by being transparent and open in describing their perspectives and goals.

I constructed a case study database and stored it in a password protected computer. The database included the final, approved interview transcripts, field notes from the observations, and the unannotated sourced documents. Yin (2018) encourages using a case study database as part of the process and argues that it markedly increases reliability. A case study database exists apart from and is distinct from the case study itself and provides a situs for compiling the data from the case in an organized manner (Yin, 2014). I used Microsoft © Office 365 tools to store and organize the collected data, as Yin (2018) suggested. Using a case study database assists with the reliability of the study by maintaining the raw data separate from the assumptions and biases of the researcher and improving access to the data for other researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Individual Interviews

The interview as a qualitative research data-gathering tool obtains detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences with a phenomenon (Kvale, 1996; Moustakas, 1994; Weiss, 1994). The interviews for this study were semi-structured to make space for meaning-making and to obtain thick descriptions of the phenomena and processes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Krauss (2005) shares that the analysis of the qualitative data is the centering inquiry on how members explain a problematic area. The interviews were scheduled for a minimum of one hour to secure in-depth, rich data and information. Active interviews actively endeavor to facilitate meaning-making as a continual process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In order to maximize meaning-making, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) encourage and suggest flexibility, openness to contextual shifting, reflexiveness, and recognition of virtual tellings while maintaining the researcher's interpretive stance. Before initiating any interviews, I ensured understanding of and compliance with all ethical considerations, including those set forth by the Liberty University IRB, site approvals, informed consents, and confidentiality procedures. These considerations were discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

I requested individual, in-person interviews, as this can assist with building trust and a rapport with the participants. I asked the interviewee if they have a preference for a quiet place where we can meet and where there will be limited interruptions. If the participants were not able or willing to meet with me in person, I requested a video call to perform the interviews. Semi-structured interviews permit more unrestricted and open sharing by participants, resulting in richer data (Rashid et al., 2019). Personally identifiable information was redacted or removed and replaced with assigned pseudonyms. Each interview session was followed by contemporaneous analysis with rigorous coding in line with case study procedures (Rashid et al., 2019). I refined the questions based on the data that was elicited and themes and codes that may be revealed in the first data collection interview. The resulting data was used for constant comparison and theoretical sampling until concept saturation (Alam, 2021).

I began each interview by building rapport with the participant. I inquired on how they were doing and how their day and week had progressed. I provided a brief overview of the purpose of my study and reminded them that they could stop the interview or withdraw from the interview and study at any time and how to do so. I provided race-neutral and culturally inclusive pseudonymous options to avoid creating stress (Edwards, 2020). All participants accepted their proposed pseudonym. Allen and Wiles (2016) suggested allowing participants the option of selecting their own pseudonym offers participants a feeling of ownership in the process of theory providing data. I then proceeded to the listed interview questions below.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your association with CCX and how long you have been connected with the institution.
2. Please share your educational and career journey with me.
3. Please describe your involvement in the decision-making process at the foundation. Moreover, who else participates in this decision-making process, and how so?
4. Please describe the step-by-step process and procedures for grantmaking decision-making.
5. Please describe any other separate processes (formal or informal) involved in the decision-making process.
6. When deciding which beneficiaries (or target population) to support, what are some of the main factors that the foundation takes into account?
7. What is the role of the perceived need of the population or vulnerability?
8. Please share some future directions in which the foundation may be headed concerning

community college giving.

8A. Please share some changes over the years in the foundation.

9. We have covered much ground in our conversation, and I appreciate the time you have given to this. One final question… What else do you think would be vital for me to know? Please share any final comments if you would like.

Yin (2018) states that "experienced investigators review previous research to develop sharper and more insightful *questions* about the topic" rather than to solicit answers through a review of the literature (p. 13, emphasis in original). Questions one and two were designed to build rapport and put the interviewee at ease. Herro and Obeng-Odoom (2019) suggest that foundation leaders' education, values, and philosophical beliefs can influence the commitment to the mission. Questions three, four, and five explored the decision-making process. The description of the knowledge about these processes may be thick, rich, and detailed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Questions six and seven were designed to elicit thick, rich descriptions of the participant's experiences and perceptions of the influential factors in the decision-making on grantmaking to and on behalf of community colleges. For example, Dean and Sharfman (1996) suggest that environmental constraints may influence decision-making processes. These questions also explored their current thinking as it has been suggested that in light of the current movements around social justice and equity, it is helpful for post-secondary and philanthropic agents to vary their communications and procedures to lead the drive for justice (Cobb & Nelson, 2020). Harvey et al. (2019) contend that philanthropic foundations achieving their goals mandate acting as activists. The final three questions, eight, eight A, and nine, explored the perceived procedural changes, the future funding plans the participant might be aware of in this regard, and offered a final opportunity for the participant to share meaning and perceptions.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

I used pattern matching to identify patterns revealed during the collection of the data (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) claimed that pattern matching was an excellent methodology for determining the hows and whys of a single case study, and hence a reasonable method for presenting a comprehensive description of the case. The interviews were transcribed and read several times for accuracy and comprehension. I saved the audio and transcript of each interview under the pseudonym of the participant. I rechecked the transcripts for accuracy by listening to the audio data while comparing it to the transcription. I then sent the final transcript to the participants for reviewing for accuracy. I then grouped the individual responses to each interview question according to the question and then according to a revealed theme or concept (Yin, 2018). I sought out recurring themes, revelations, or ideas (Yin, 2018). I then created codes to assist in tracking and categorizing the data thematically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Document Analysis

Documents are valuable data sources in case studies (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014). The starting point for many in learning about philanthropic foundations is their websites and other artifacts of the organization's mission, values, focus areas, and key activities. Although many mega-foundations have robust websites containing this information, many medium and smaller foundations do not have websites, or if they do, the websites do not provide information on the grantmaking processes of the foundation. Most foundations fall in the small to medium category. I performed document analysis of CCX's mission and vision statements, strategic plan, and several meeting and board retreat minutes. I inquired if there had been any significant changes to the processes. This inquiry allowed for additional triangulation of the data. Bowen (2009) notes that it is a matter of selecting data and not so much data collecting when considering documentary data. The purpose of analyzing these documents was to determine if they included any underpinnings the foundation had asserted it would follow and if there was any guidance on decision-making for particular types of entities, including community colleges.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

Yin (2018) suggests the use of pattern-matching and cross-case synthesis. I used both of these. Pattern-matching involves a focus on the process and the outcome and casting the whys and hows (Yin, 2018). Cross-case synthesis entails maintaining the case's holistic nature and synthesizing within-case patterns (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, cross-case synthesis encourages conceptualizing vertically instead of down individually about specific factors (Yin, 2018).

Observations

The third mode of collecting data used was direct observation in the real-world environment of the case. I collected data using direct observations to gain further understanding of the phenomena and achieve triangulation. Data in a qualitative study can be collected using observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Observations were conducted first, due to timing constraint, however, efforts were made to obviate the Hawthorne effect, and it did not appear that the Hawthorne effect played any role in the collected data (Rozsahegyi, 2019). Collecting data on nonverbal communication delivers deeper data and fosters reflexiveness and, according to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010), might help with "the triple crises of representation, legitimation, and praxis" (p. 721).

Observational techniques are effective instruments for acquiring insight into phenomena and lie at the core of all case study research (Cohen et al., 2003). Although observation as a data collection tool is primarily used in ethnographies, Billups (2021) also holds that observation is a valid data collecting tool in other methods, including case studies. Observation is a tool used in qualitative research, while in the field, the researcher notes phenomena using the researcher's senses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Observation allows the researcher to learn more about what participants do rather than what may be revealed solely from self-reporting and that they may have forgotten or not even be aware that they do (Morgan et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) list the procedural steps to be followed as including obtaining permission to obtain access to the selected site to be observed, identifying who, what, when and for how long to observe, the decision on the type of observation role, developing and using an observation protocol to record both descriptive and reflective notes, providing a description of the setting, participant portraitures, events occurring, and the researcher's thinking and thoughts, and having a gatekeeper to assist with introductions and building rapport.

I functioned as a non-participant as I was not a part of the foundation leadership team. Given this study's limited time, access, and resources, I did not become a participant-observer. A nonparticipant observer actively watches, takes notes at a distance, and does not directly interact with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I performed direct observations at three CCX meetings. The observations totaled approximately 12 hours over three different days.

I acted as a non-participant, direct observer of the decision-making processes of the foundation staff and board members. The objectives for my observations included staff and leadership meetings, funding initiative committees, and board meetings to complement data collected from the individual interviews and the document analysis (Yin, 2018). The goal of my direct observations consisted of recording the ambient factors and exchanges between leadership team members and board of directors that contribute to understanding the phenomenon of how foundations decide to find community colleges and community college IOs.

Following a systematic process in collecting observational data increases reliability of the data and the study, as does an increased number of observations (Cohen et al., 2003). Direct observation also calls for not abruptly exiting, showing gratitude, and explaining the data use and how they can access the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thick, rich notes were taken describing what I observed throughout the observation, including the setting and participants. According to Cohen et al. (2003), data gathered using observation as a collection tool should be extensive enough to allow the reader to duplicate the completed analysis. Sacks (1992) provides that a researcher's observation notes should be focused on what is observed and make clear what the researcher is inferring from what is observable. As observation mandates a researcher filter what the researcher sees through the researcher's lens, perspective, and inherent prejudices, researchers using observation must also be adept at reflexiveness (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

During data collection, the researcher provides significant information and precise descriptions documenting inferences and interactions revealed during the observations (Billups, 2021; Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher examines how subjects articulate, engage, react to different cues, sensesmake their surroundings, and regulate their own actions, communication, and physiological adjustments to the environment (Angrosino, 2014). Billups (2021) recommends listening to discussions and witnessing interactions prior to commencing note-taking. She suggests pre note-taking assists researchers in understanding the typical for the situs. Such waiting guarantees that the researcher does not draw conclusions too hastily based on his or her initial observations.

Creswell and Poth (2018) share that complete and detailed observation descriptions should be done using contemporaneous and narrative notetaking. Constancy in field notes (fostered by the structure of the observation protocol template) and practitioner debrief meetings after the observations mitigate the possibility of researcher partiality in assessing what the researcher saw and heard in the field (Rozsahegyi, 2019). I followed all observation protocols. The observation protocol is attached as Appendix D to this study. When collecting field notes, it has been further suggested by Lofland (1971) that observation field notes should be recorded as soon as possible and that at a minimum, there should be two single-spaced typed pages of notes for every hour of actual observation.

Observations Data Analysis Plan

Cohen et al. (2003) suggest that inferences drawn from observational data be corroborated and triangulated with data collected using other methods. Observation, as a component of part of a triangulation attempt, may also provide a unique viewpoint when contrasted to verbal or written results (Billups, 2021). Yin (2018) stated that direct observations are a supplemental method of data gathering that allows the finding of further information on the case under study. Théron (2020) affirms prior research reveals that a flexible and adaptive observational design combined with somewhat systematic note-taking about behaviors, objects, situational aspects, individuals, and discourse among actors may all converge to obtain valuable data about in site cognitive processes. The data solicited and revealed by observation was coded and compared to the data gathered from the interviews and document analysis. Observations were compiled using the templates suggested by Billups (2021) to standardize the format of gathered data for more efficient analysis.

Data Synthesis

Qualitative data was studied and examined to determine answers to the research questions (Yin, 2018). Krauss (2005) notes that the unique effort of qualitative research, particularly, data analysis - to discover the contributions to the distinctive meaning for both single and multiple persons. Analysis as an activity, Krauss argues, operates highly intuitively. Marshall and Rossman (2006) pointed out that in qualitative and quantitative data analysis, there remains a mystery to the act of interpretation. The interpretive act is the process by which meaning is assigned to expressionless, raw data; it is a transformative act to findings from data. Qualitative research is an ongoing, participatory, and vigorous procedure which stays current with innovative methodology developments (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). As a novice researcher, I faithfully implemented the requirements of the case study method (Rashid et al., 2019; Varela et al., 2021). Although Meyer (2001) argues that there is limited information on the methodological range of case studies, I utilized the available tools to uncover themes, patterns, and trends in case studies by reading and synthesizing the literature on data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that data analysis requires three parallel movements: reducing the data, displaying the data, and verifying.

Miles and Huberman (1994) provide that interviews, after full and accurate transcription, be analyzed using an inductive style. Inductive analysis involves allowing themes, concepts, and theories to emerge from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). In addition, Thomas (2006) counters that although deductive analysis tests whether empirical data aligns with an existing identified theory, it is not as useful for developing theory. Practically, however, both forms of analysis are commonly utilized by researchers.

I created a data management plan to ensure that my data was effectively managed through the lifecycle of my study and after for an appropriate time. Coding involves categorizing the data into patterns and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used Microsoft Word and Excel to organize and manage the coding data and themes. I engaged in a constant cycle of coding and memoing. Saldaña (2021) writes that summaries of data of a qualitative nature, including patterns, groupings, topics are actively formed, established, generated, and changed by the researcher. Codes were revised, reassessed, and refined to reduce overlapping and redundancy of themes (Thomas, 2006). I used memo writing. Memo writing is helpful in all qualitative research, not only grounded theory designs (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

According to Yin (2018), there are four general data analysis strategies. These strategies include "relying on theoretical propositions", working the data from the "ground up", "developing a case description", and an examination of "plausible rival explanations" (Yin, 2018, pp. 168-172). As stated earlier, in justifying the use of the single-case design for this study, I explored the applicability of the garbage can model to explain the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations in funding community colleges and community college-focused IOs. Accordingly, before beginning data collection, the decision was made to rely on a theoretical proposition to maintain alignment and focus within this study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) shared "affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews; noting reflections or other remarks in the margins; sorting and sifting through the materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between sub-groups, and common sequences" as "common practices that frequently are used in qualitative analysis (p. 9). Lester et al. (2020) urge novice researchers use thematic analysis as it is theoretically flexible and may allow the generation of a "more meaningful and relevant analysis for a given field" (p. 98).

When conducting thematic analysis Lester et al. (2020) advise conceptualizing the process in phases. According to Lester et al., phase one was preparing and organizing the data for analysis. The entire corpus of data was prepared and organized before beginning to deal with the data substantively. This phase involved “a structure naming protocol for each file, as well as the production of a master data catalog that lists each data source, its storage location, its creator, and the date of its collection” (p. 99). Phase two involved transcribing audio and video data. Lester et al. advised that transcribing audio data verbatim is common in thematic analysis. They further urged researchers to transcribe the audio data themselves. By doing so, they suggest it assists researcher familiarity with the data and speeds up later analysis. I transcribed the audio myself to increase familiarity with the data.

Phase three of thematic analysis involved becoming familiar with the data, according to Lester et al. I notated, as they suggest for this phase, how I reacted to the data in detail and noted areas of limitations and gaps for future or additional research. Phase four was memoing the data. By taking contemporaneous notes of reactions to the data, researchers converse with themselves and record emerging comprehensions and possible bias that could impact data interpretations.

Coding the data was phase five of Lester et al.’s thematic analysis process. It is described as a particularly important phase. I followed the three phases of coding in this phase by first noting the data that is of “analytical importance” (Lester et al., 2020, p 100). Saldaña (2021) advises that qualitative analysis involves creativity and there is not a mechanistic strategy for accomplishing it. Secondly, to begin making connections urged by Lester et al., I assigned additional codes thinking about “concepts and/or ideas that are more directly related to the focus of the study” (p. 100). The last stage of coding was where I connected the “statements, experiences, and reflections with specific conceptual or theoretical ideas” (p. 100).

In Phase six, moving from codes to categories and categories to themes, I applied codes, developed categories, and lastly, produced themes. Themes should be in alignment with the goals of the paper and respond to the main research questions (Lester et al., 2020). The final phase was making the analytic process transparent (Lester et al., 2020). In this last stage of thematic analysis, I mapped the processes used in developing the themes and provided the audit trail connecting the path from data to themes. The audit trail assists in establishing trustworthy interpretations. I cross-checked my thematic analysis for quality and thoroughness, being sensitive to and reflective of the varying forms of thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis 15-point checklist.

Interviews, document reviews, and observation were the three methods of data collection in this study. Once the strategy has been determined, Yin (2018) offers five analytic techniques for data analysis. By using these techniques, issues with both internal and external validity can be addressed (Yin, 2018). The five techniques include cross-case synthesis, pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, and logic models. Yin (2018) asserts the superiority of pattern matching logic. According to Yin (2009), pattern-matching is the original and primary method of analyzing case studies.

Saldaña (2013, 2021) offers other data analyses and syntheses methods. He refers to coding for patterns and indicates that patterns offer proof that the evidence is significant and can be trusted. Patterns can assist with solidifying the significance of what is observed (Saldaña, 2021). Compelling arguments must be utilized with pattern matching, as well as accounting for rivals. Flexible pattern matching is a potent technique for exploratory research based on pre-existing ideas or subjects (Bouncken et al., 2021). As this will be an explorative case study, the pattern matching process was even more critical. In analyzing the data, regardless of the technique, the principles of attending to all other evidence, investigating all plausible rivals, addressing the most significant aspects of the case, and possessing knowledge of the current knowledge around the topic are essential (Yin, 2018).

To address rigor in case study design, it has been argued that findings from case studies must be compared to previous studies' findings when analyzing the data (Varela et al., 2021). I considered and compared findings from previous studies. Research in innovation management studies found case studies were missing rigor because these innovation management studies failed to justify the appropriateness of using case study. In addition, no criteria for theoretical sampling were applied; data collection, analysis, and manner of drawing the conclusions lacked transparency, lastly, interpreting the results amounted to describing only (Goffin et al., 2019). I ensured that these shortcomings were avoided in this case study.

Trustworthiness

Performing qualitative research with rigor and trustworthiness was critical. The data analysis contributed to the trustworthiness by ensuring that it was conducted in an exact, even, and thorough way by recategorizing, standardizing, and revealing the techniques of analyzing in sufficient specificity for the audience to evaluate where the procedure was convincing (Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Avoiding deception was a factor in establishing trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers must adhere to these matters to ensure that the findings being pressed forward are authentic (Anney, 2014). Ensuring trustworthiness was further addressed by several other procedures. These procedures were set forth below.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative studies is considered analogous to validity in quantitative studies (Schwandt et al., 2007). I implemented triangulation by collecting data using at least three different data sources. I provided the participants with the opportunity to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. Another method that may be used to increase credibility is peer debriefing (Thomas, 2006). I shared the draft findings and conclusions with the designated member of the leadership team, Truman, for his review. He suggested several clarifying edits as well as several deletions to prevent the site from being identified. I incorporated that feedback as it did not impact the findings or results.

Transferability

Transferability is nearly synonymous with the quantitative concept of generalizability (Anney, 2014; Bitsch, 2005). Philliber et al. (1980) offer that by selecting a typical case of one, issues of generalizability are offset and moderated to some extent. A detailed description of the questions, participants, and observed settings have been attached as Appendix C to allow future researchers to recreate the study (Goffin et al., 2019).

Dependability

Similar to the quantitative concept of reliability, dependability in a qualitative study addresses and refers to constancy throughout the findings (Bitsch, 2005). According to Bitsch (2005), dependability addresses the issue of whether research findings would be the same if the study were duplicated with the same or comparable subjects and in a similar situation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide that dependability is shown when consistent and repeatable findings exist. I used an audit trail to record my thinking, decisions, and actions. An audit trail allows a researcher to recreate and revisit the procedures used and confirm the path followed to arrive at the finding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of the case study database will further help in conducting the audit trail

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers are able to confirm the verifiability of the research in a study (Creswell, 2013). Ensuring that the findings are shaped by the participant's responses and not by researcher biases bears on the confirmability of a study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was established using an audit trail and triangulation.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained informed consent and ensured that all participants are over 18 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I ensured confidentiality by not transporting the data outside my home except when traveling to and from collecting data. I immediately removed it from my vehicle when in transit from interviews and data gathering. I also ensured compliance with securing data as mandated by the Liberty University IRB guidelines. I stored all data in password-encrypted folders on a password-encrypted computer (Swain, 2016). In addition, I stored print documents containing personally identifiable information or other confidential information in a locked cabinet that only I had and have the key to access (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I shared the transcripts of my conversations with each of the interviewed subjects. After confirming the accuracy of the transcripts, I coded the data. I advised all participants that my contact with and outreach to them had concluded and that our relationship of researcher and participant had concluded within a timely manner. I also used a pseudonym to prevent disclosure of the organization's identity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The named methods covered the ethical considerations of informed consent and data storage and destruction. In addition, I used pseudonyms for the individual participants. Finally, I adhered to the destruction of data protocols (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

Determining the appropriate methodology required an understanding of research philosophy. The question of 'why research' reveals the perspective of the researcher. The researcher's ontological, epistemological, nature of humanity, and methodological assumptions have been set forth in this chapter. I elected to utilize a qualitative study because I wanted to discover how the decision-making processes of philanthropic grantmaking foundations are operationalized as they considered providing grants and support for community colleges and community college-focused IOs in the United States. Case study was ideal for pursuing this discovery because I desired to understand human experiences and perceptions of the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations deciding to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single-case case study was to explore the decision-making process of an endowed philanthropic foundation when deciding to fund community colleges. The case was an endowed, 501(c)(3) philanthropic foundation located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Data for this qualitative, explorative, single case study was collected using interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis as the specific data collection methodologies. By employing triangulation, researchers can examine a phenomenon from a variety of angles and derive themes based on concepts substantiated by multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). Data analysis included coding and thematic analysis. The background and roles of the participants are included in this chapter. The demographics and descriptions of the participants are limited as they requested anonymity for themselves as individuals and for the organization. Due to these requests, little detail was provided about the foundation and participants. Theme development and the methods used to collect data are also included in this chapter. In this chapter, I present the findings from the interviews, observations, and document analysis. The chapter then ends with a summary.

Participants

This study included a single case, the CCX Foundation. This study's sample consisted of 10 purposively selected employees and board members of an endowed philanthropic foundation serving as the site for this study. The sampling criteria included being employed as a staff member of the philanthropic foundation and involved in the decision-making process or being a board of directors member. Each participant met the criteria outlined in Chapter Three. The foundation executive leaders provided the names of the 10 participants, including six of the site foundation’s staff members and four of its board members contacted by the foundation's CEO and that agreed to join the study. A slim majority of participants were staff members. Six of the interviewed participants were employed by the foundation, and four of the interviewed participants were board members. Participation in this study was optional, as clearly stated verbally and in the informed consent form signed by the participants before data collection.

The themes presented in this chapter were derived from analyzing transcripts of interviews conducted with each participant, observing a staff recommendation meeting, the board committees meeting, and a full board meeting, and document analysis of online organizational documents, including the foundation’s strategic plan as well as internal documents shared by the senior leadership of the foundation, including by-laws and minutes. Table 1 displays a demographic summary of the participants. This table contains each participant’s pseudonym, gender, age range, and role.

Table 1

Foundation Participants

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Role
Ashley	Female	55-65	Foundation Staff
Bailey	Female	65-75	Board Member
Charles	Male	60-70	Foundation Staff
Dennis	Male	60-70	Board Member
Greer	Female	30-40	Foundation Staff
Ike	Male	60-70	Board Member
Lance	Male	60-70	Board Member
Michelle	Female	45-55	Foundation Staff

Ross	Male	40-50	Foundation Staff
Truman	Male	45-55	Foundation Staff
N-10	F=4 (40%)		Staff = 6 (60%)
	M=6 (60%)		BOD = 4 (40%)

Ashley

Ashley was a woman who worked at the foundation for approximately 20 years. She had obtained her bachelor's degree. She has a master's in business administration. She has worked in private industry, including banking/finance, marketing, and medical. "I am such a proponent of the community college system." She expressed concern for the long-term impact of the funding to community colleges. Ashley expressed her agreement with the statement of the problem in this study. Although she acknowledged the importance of philanthropic contributions to community colleges and had a personal connection with a family member attending and obtaining a degree from a community college, she also expressed concern that philanthropic contributions should not replace the responsibility of states to fund community colleges. She agreed that philanthropic contributions could also help to fund specific programs or initiatives that may not be covered by state funding as an additional source of support rather than a replacement. Ashley urged that supplanting instead of supplementing could be problematic in the long run.

> I identify all these problems, but I have no solutions. I don't know how you find the balance between support without that falling into that role of supplanting dollars, which is so easy over time. You look back and then you say, where are state dollars.

Ashley noted the importance of ensuring that all individuals have access to job opportunities. She indicated that reaching everybody was a mandate and non-negotiable need.

Bailey

Bailey was a woman and was currently serving in her second four-year term on the board of directors. She has an Ed. D in educational leadership. She had previously worked in various areas within the public sector. She noted the homogeneity of the board in demographics and educational and professional backgrounds. Further, she expressed a desire for the board to be more diverse in composition, including age, and shared her desire for younger board members to join and bring more innovation. In addition, she stated, “I want the board to be more diverse in their funding and their processing of things.” She noted experiencing some external pressure from serving on the board from people seeking funding from CCX.

Charles

Charles was a man and had worked at the foundation for approximately three and one-half years. He had a bachelor’s degree. His background was in economic development. In speaking about the work CCX does with community colleges, he stated, “Where CCX does our work is having those relationships with community college presidents.” According to Charles, workforce and talent development initiatives have become increasingly important, making engaging with community college presidents necessary. As a result of these meetings, CCX received a number of applications for funding various initiatives. He further communicated the importance of networking and building relationships with community colleges.

> But reach out to us and let's talk about it. And we might be able to help with funding in a different way by directing them to other opportunities or they may be coming at it with different outcomes. But with a conversation, we realize we can look at outcomes that fit our priority areas. There's a lot of due diligence that goes into a recommendation to the board to be sure that it aligns and there are tangible outcomes and there is a lot of work to

> go into managing that funding from the administration side of the recipient of those funds, that they have to be accountable back to us that those dollars were deployed in the manner they said they would be and that they were approved to be. As we move and work with our potential entities that we can fund it, we want to make sure that they have clarity of our priority areas, and that we have outcomes and that there's going to be work with these… it is more than some, but not as much as say a federal grant. But there is reporting and accountability that has to go along with that.

The jobs CCX helps students attain, according to Charles, do not cure every problem, "but probably 90%."

> [Jobs] don't cure everything, but they cure the majority of the problems that society faces. And so when I realize what that meant to a person to get a job that was life changing, was when I realized I was doing the work that was satisfying and fulfilling to me.

Charles's passion and sincerity regarding how much care he felt for the work of CCX were apparent in his tone, body language, and earnest delivery.

Dennis

Dennis was a man and had served on the board of directors for eight years or two terms. He holds a bachelor's degree and also attended a community college. He was a practicing professional and had his professional license to practice. He expressed his view that CCX has to look closely at [project funding requests] because CCX funding has to benefit the many and not the "very few." He further shared that he views community colleges as community beacons and catalysts.

> Catalyst for the community. Usually community college… You never hear negative things about the college, no matter what the towns are fussing about. Everybody loves the college, and I think they're the definite catalyst for this type of thing in the future.

Dennis enjoys serving on the board more than any other board he has served on and expressed admiration for the board's commitment to the mission.

Greer

Greer was a woman and had worked at the foundation for seven years. She had her bachelor’s degree. She has worked in high-level state politics. She describes CCX as “a very mission-driven team.” Greer described feeling motivated to come in every day to help people, including helping them get jobs. “That's literally our everyday, trying to figure out how to make someone's life better.” She acknowledged the difficulty of the work but was up to the challenge, “Nothing is hard if you want to try it…It's hard work. All things are hard work…”

> I'm trying to think back to your thesis around community colleges and funding. I think the more attention we can all pay to deconstructing the systems first, there's a lot of solutions oriented problem solving, right? People want to just fix the problem by adding on a new process. I think there's more that can be done at the system level, at the community college level, at the funder level of just making some of this stuff easier, right? It's not a new form, it's not a new process. It’s looking back at all the stuff and saying this is stupid, let's do it differently from time to time…I think the more we can all kind of focus on deconstructing things, sometimes it's just not as hard as, things that don't have to be this hard…There's so many problems. Why are we focusing on this when there's this, this, and that? We're not going to be a funder of all things. We're not going to

> fix every problem…Everything is everything for us as a funder. The hardest thing is, I'm sure Charles used this line, not every good project is a CCX project.

These quotes reveal Greer's perceptions that people tend to focus on adding new processes to fix problems instead of looking at the system as a whole. In addition, Greer explored the idea of needing to deconstruct the current system and focus on solutions-oriented problem-solving. She wants to make the funding process easier and acknowledges that it is not possible to fund every project.

Ike

Ike was a man who had served on the board of directors for two terms and serving in his third four-year term. He had a professional degree. He was a practicing professional and had his professional license to practice his profession. Like Dennis and Bailey, Ike noted the status and quality of the CCX board and the selfless commitment the board members had to the CCX mission and not having personal agendas. Ike felt that the strength and past performance of the community college in implementing grants should be considered. In addition, the location of the community college, the sustainability of the program, the job skills required, and the availability of other funders were some factors considered by CCX in its decision-making. Similar to other participants, he noted that CCX could not fund every ask or need.

> Well, if we're talking about programs in community college, I assume that's what you're talking about. Is there a need for that? Truck drivers? Yes. The community college comes, one, how strong has this community college been in the past? How well are they at implementing grants? I think we do look at that. Two, what's their program they want, what's the sustainability of that program going to be? How they going to sustain it? Because if we give an infusion of money, is it going to go away, or do they have the

funds down the pipeline to do that? Three, what job skills are they trying to meet? So what industry is out there for that? A lot of times they'll say, well, we've got these industries out here and they need this job skill because normally when we fund, we don't fund that. We're not funding all of it. What other funders are coming to the table to provide the resources there to make this work both now and long term? Again, what area of the state are they in to be able to meet to help, again, that core mission of helping jobs in these economically distressed rural areas?

Lance

Lance was a man serving his first term on the board of directors. He had a bachelor's degree and owned a successful business. Lance highlights the need for more risk-taking and funding in rural counties of eastern and western parts of the state. He believes that CCX needs to expand its focus and take bigger risks to have an impact in these geographical areas. As he states below, K-12 and community colleges are critical in providing a skilled workforce for companies to locate in these areas.

> I think that we have been able to talk with the board and the staff about changing some of the parameters that we have that we look at. But I would have to say that none of them are to me, in the community college realm. I say, why can't we do something in these rural counties? It doesn't have to be that much. It could be [$X] million. That really doesn't have much to do with directly with community colleges. Let me tell you where it could be important. The biggest single reason, the challenge to getting companies to locate [to an area] is they're concerned about… having enough people to do what they need to do, who can get the job done. That is where I think the absolute critical piece of that is our K-12 and community colleges in those rural counties. We have got to…we've

> got to commit to both of those. We've got your education. What's the percentage of third graders now that cannot read at grade level primarily due to they have a real setback due to COVID? I understand that, but how are we going to rectify that? How are we going to fix that? If they can't read at grade three, then they're going to trail all the way up. When we want to have them go to community college, they've got to spend some of their time in remedial reading and math programs because they can't do community college level work. It's going to take money to do all that. I think CCX needs to look at [that], we talked about do we do something in conjunction? Those areas where I think CCX needs to expand our focus to more risk taking and getting little bit outside of our box we've been in, and it could potentially be more funding at the community college level.

Michelle

Michelle was a woman and had worked at the foundation for nine and one-half years. She had two professional degrees but did not pursue a traditional career track for either. She highlighted the need for community colleges to tell their story to support the funding need and request.

> I think on some level it's incumbent upon community colleges to have their strategy, to know what their goals are, to have their strategy, and to be able to tell their story so that it resonates with a funder in that funder's interest. Well, I think that's a big part of it.

Collaboration between community colleges can be an effective way to make the most of CCX funding, improve the quality of education provided to students, and allow access to additional opportunities.

> I think collaborating with other community colleges. You have all these foundations that have a lot of money, but it's still not enough to meet all the needs. We can't put

> everything everywhere. We're not asking community colleges to consolidate, but if you can collaborate, I think that's more attractive, at least to me in my position, knowing that I'm not putting a full…lab here and then you go 20 miles down the road and there's another. How can we put one here, then maybe do the classroom time in the community [college] center here and then transport students back and forth? Seeing that collaboration to make the dollar stretch, I think is helpful.

Ross

Ross was a man and had worked at the foundation for seven years. He holds a master’s degree and also attended a community college. Ross expressed his desire to overcome barriers between CCX, other philanthropic organizations, and governmental grant-making departments. He desired to work on building these relationships so CCX could become even more effective in its philanthropic efforts. Ross is pleased with the direction and is optimistic about the future

> The only additional thing I'd like to see at CCX is for us to continue to break down silos between us and other philanthropic organizations and other grant making departments with state and federal government. We have been working on this issue, and I would like to see it even more… How do we find ways to better coordinate our efforts so that they're complementary? And I think what we often do is we'll have great ideas at the same time…So sometimes we find ourselves operating in parallel. That's one thing I hope we continue to work on moving forward. But I'm very pleased with where we're headed. I think there's an opportunity for growth.

Truman

Truman was a man and had worked at the foundation for 18 years. He had a professional degree. He was a practicing professional and had his professional license to practice. Community colleges face several challenges that could be the causes of the lack of funding from foundations and individuals. Many are tied to image and perception. Truman offered the following:

> Well, I think one of the challenges that community colleges face is that a lot of foundations don't fund public schools or educational organizations, for whatever reason. It's maybe a perception issue. I think that doesn't apply to four-year universities, even though they may be public universities. I think funders are more comfortable making contributions and then maybe foundations and maybe individuals to four year universities and community colleges have been seen, I think have been seen, as kind of an adjunct to high schools and more like the public schools and less like the universities. And so I think that's a challenge for some foundations. From our perspective, I think we recognize the difference in the capacity of community colleges across the state… you go look at [name] Community College, which is you know, about the size of our office building here and they just don't have the resources to do those kinds of things…I think one of the challenges is that people, organizations think about community colleges like high schools in the context of funding, and they are kind of outside of funding priorities, and we have to think of them as…opportunities. And how do we help them better achieve their missions and be more responsive to the opportunities that they have in their communities. They do receive state funding, they receive local funding, they have a lot of funding sources. But are those adequate to accomplish or to respond to the opportunities, may be a better way to phrase that and can they represent themselves in the community to make sure that people there have the best chance to be successful.

According to Truman, these perceptions may have led to the funding gap, with community colleges receiving less funding than their four-year counterparts. Truman also discussed the challenges faced by individuals who wish to attend community college but cannot afford the cost of attendance.

> There are a lot of counties in [this state] now that have, you know, a hope program or an opportunity program or whatever, where they will agree to pay for the tuition for anybody who attends community college in that county. And those tend to be more well-resourced urban counties, but importantly, they typically don't fund the cost of attendance. They fund the tuition. When you're talking about people who don't have cars, and they've got to deal with childcare, all those kinds of things. Those are the stumbling blocks to people completing their education… because it's you know, if you're going in to learn to be an electric lineman, and you can't afford the equipment that you have to have to take a class then you can't, you're obviously not going to be successful. So we tried to make sure we cover those gaps…some people just don't fully think about what the challenges are.

Results

A case study design was followed for this current study. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory, holistic, single-case case study was to identify factors influencing the decision-making process and to explore the decision-making processes of philanthropic foundations when deciding to fund community colleges. The questions posed during the interviews were designed to align with the central research question and address the specific matters raised by the sub-questions (See Appendix G). Data were collected through in-person interviews of the participant staff members in the main conference room at the foundation headquarters and the participant board members through the Zoom video conferencing software. This researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant according to the interviewee's availability. All interviewees were interviewed individually and privately. After each interview, this researcher listened to each audio recording and transcribed each interview verbatim. After the initial transcription, I listened again to the audio while re-reading the transcripts. The reviewed transcripts for each participant were then sent separately to each interviewed participant for review of their own transcript. I requested that each participant review their individual transcript and advise if there were any edits, additional feedback, clarifications, or corrections. I also requested that they indicate acceptance if there were no changes. Six of the ten participants provided edits and corrections. I made the corrections and accepted the transcripts.

In order to answer the central research question and two sub-questions, a thorough analysis of the data was carried out through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I read and re-read the interview transcripts, reviewed documents and observation field notes, I began to inductively create codes from the data. I applied the codes to develop categories and produce themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lester et al., 2020). After I developed the themes, I identified quotes supporting and informing the themes. I reviewed the data, codes, and themes through seven rounds until I had maximized my understanding and was satisfied that I had identified the essence of the phenomena and that the themes integrated and provided meaning to the research questions.

This researcher analyzed and interpreted the constructed themes. Consideration was then given to the relationship between themes, the research questions, and GCM. Each research question was addressed and answered based on the key themes and the specific data gleaned from the participant interviews, observations, or documents. The verbatim words of the participants and the three emergent themes that were produced answered the research questions.

Three themes were uncovered during the analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The first theme focused on mission and priority alignment with highlighted sub-themes of due diligence, needs and demand, and impact and outcomes. The second theme is related to strategic direction and focus (priorities, vision, mission, goals) and an associated sub-theme of sustainability. The third and final theme centered on collaboration and flexibility and had two sub-themes: ambiguity-flexibility and adaptation-evolution. Table 2 lists the emergent themes and sub-themes from the data analysis.

Table 2

Themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Quote
Mission and Priority Alignment	Due Diligence Needs and Demand Impact and Outcomes	“There's a lot of due diligence that goes into a recommendation to the board to be sure that it aligns and there are tangible outcomes and there is a lot of work to go into managing that funding from the administration”
Strategic direction and focus (priorities, vision, mission, goals)	Sustainability	“I'm hoping as the Board goes into its next phase of strategic planning, we can really start delineating some specific proactive strategies that builds the workforce we need.”
Collaboration and Flexibility	Collaboration Ambiguity-Flexibility and Adaptation-Evolution	"So as we engage and network and develop relationships with those other philanthropic entities, it is to help leverage and collaborate with our work, but we convene them as well...We have major funder gatherings where some of us would just get together for a meeting, talk about what's going on, what are you seeing, what are you hearing, those types of things, so that we have a good sense, first of all, that we have a relationship.”

Mission and Priority Alignment

The findings revealed consistency in understanding the variance in roles between staff and board members. Participants agreed on the roles of the different titled staff members within the organization. Power dynamics and decision-making authority within the organization were reported to be clear, respected, and appreciated by the participants. However, one participant stated, “Decision making. Even though the organizational chart looks a little decentralized. Decision making, I think overall decision making is fairly centralized.” This same participant later advised, “We don't make any decisions, but we are the ones who do the follow up and then assign a program officer to the ones that we think are aligned with what the foundation's priorities are.” The organization has experienced changes in its structure over time as it has grown in size and scope of work. A participant reported an apparent transition and evolution from a small and collegial structure to a more bureaucratic and hierarchical one.

Charles reported aligning the foundation’s priorities with what the foundation actually does as a key task for him. The participants described a form of gatekeeping for mission and priority alignment for funding requests and board priorities. Board feedback assists in the gatekeeping process, according to Ross. Bailey stated, “We sit and listen to the staff describe the projects and tell us what the projects will do and whether or not the projects are in line with the mission and the goals of the CCX foundation.”

All interviewed foundation staff confirmed that staff carefully review each application to ensure it aligns with the board’s funding priorities and the specific goals that have been set. Additionally, CCX implements outreach and marketing strategies to increase awareness of funding opportunities that contribute to the organization’s goals. They also strategize on increasing recruitment and outreach for problems that the foundation might be able to assist in solving and scaffolding.

The foundation staff and board members seek appropriate solutions aligning with the organization's goals. Michelle shared, "Sometimes we can either stave off projects that just don't align, or if there's some potential for alignment, we can help direct them into refining their project so that it does align more." According to Ross, "We (CCX staff) 'end up' in alignment with the recommendations of the board. A participant shared, "When it comes, [pause], to be very frank, I often feel like that we have a lot of responsibility and little authority in some areas." Bailey further emphasized, "Make sure we're within our mission and goal statement and looking at those aspects."

Projects are evaluated holistically based on their overall benefits and alignment with priority funding areas. The findings highlight the importance of community colleges' storytelling in relation to funders' interests and for alignment with funders' interests. Funders are more likely to provide funding if the project's story aligns with the funder's goals. Michelle offered:

> I think on some level it's incumbent upon community colleges to have their strategy, to know what their goals are, to have their strategy, and to be able to tell their story so that it resonates with a funder in that funder's interest. Well, I think that's a big part of it. Education is important to a lot of people and to a lot of foundations. Some of them are more concerned about early childhood, K thru 12. From a funder's perspective, I think if you can tell your story and show how this project that's helping me achieve this overall goal that we've set meets with this foundation, I think they're subject to get more funding.

Alignment with the organization's goals and mission was a key factor in considering funding for community colleges. According to Ross:

> And if you can put money toward that and allow for that flexibility for those community colleges to say we know our students and as those issues come up, we're going to utilize those funds to help those students be successful, that is great.

Moreover, providing flexible funding allows community colleges to address emerging student needs and contribute to their success. It was shared that staff are tasked with clarifying the presence of that alignment to the board members. It was crucial to determine the boundaries and intersections of these two aspects.

Due Diligence

The staff's role within CCX is to conduct due diligence on projects and applications to determine if they align with the organization's funding priorities. The organization approaches funding requests from two distinct perspectives - the demand side and the supply side. In order to make informed funding decisions, the organization conducts a comprehensive analysis that considers both the supply and demand sides of the equation. They start with written or phone conversations as a preliminary assessment, followed by site visits to gain deeper insights into the projects, meet the individuals involved, and observe the intended utilization of funds. The organization approaches funding requests from two distinct perspectives - the demand side and the supply side. On the demand side, they identify employers within the community who require individuals with specific skill sets and aim to provide the necessary training to meet these job opportunities.

However, they also consider the supply side, taking into account the perceived needs of potential trainees or beneficiaries. Ashley stated, "We request for not-for-profits, we request three years of audited financials, board list, key staff, people involved in the process." Program officers carry out this due diligence and present their findings to their division directors. They engage with the programs committee chair to seek guidance from the board during their due diligence process, ensuring that their recommendations are well-informed and aligned with the board's perspective. The staff conducts investigations based on CCX's due diligence guidelines, which serve as a framework for evaluating projects. Truman commented:

> If you don't have at least one of the identified priority outcomes, unless it's an extraordinary kind of project, then it's not likely that your project will be competitive because there are going to be so many other projects in the pool that do align well. That results in kind of a tension between innovation and making sure they align, even though the overall outcomes are what they are. Sometimes there are creative approaches that might not fit into our box of what seems to be when you connect the dots, that seems to be in kind of the don't want to say standard of what we do, but maybe what has been funded in the past as having met a lot of what our priority outcomes that are desired. So that helps staff narrow in. That's what we use as our guidelines. Does it meet our mission? Do they have priority outcomes? Are they asking for the right amount of money?

Although no document is filled out for each review, these guidelines prompt staff members to consider key questions during their investigations. Ashley stated:

> We come together as a programs staff and discuss all the projects. That means other folks who aren't assigned to the projects have a chance to listen and provide their feedback, ask their questions. We may have additional follow-up with the applicants after those

> programs meetings, recommendation meetings, then we share our thoughts. And that's the official process. There are lots of little one-off conversations.

CCX provides due diligence guidance to staff members to facilitate their evaluations.

The board's funding priorities serve as a foundation for the due diligence process, with specific outcomes outlined for each priority. "I think what we've been able to do over the last couple of years is drill down more specifically on our outcomes," stated Greer. Charles advised:

> Sometimes we will engage the chair of the programs committee (the chair is a Board member) with a question about a project if we, need a little guidance from the board as we do our due diligence and come up with what our recommendation would be. The board members are there to provide insight from their perspective so that we can come up with a recommendation.

Stage two of the evaluation process involves more detailed due diligence, assessing the organization's capacity, budget, and sustainability plans. Additionally, staff members consider the project requester's ability to measure and report outcomes if CCX's funding is deployed.

The board and staff members expressed confidence in CCX's due diligence process. "There's a lot of due diligence that goes into a recommendation to the board to be sure that it aligns and there are tangible outcomes," stated Charles. The board acknowledges the thoroughness of the staff's evaluations and considers their recommendations reliable. Similarly, Michelle said, "They do seem to have confidence in staff's due diligence process and think we do a thorough job. They have articulated that at least." Bailey confirmed this, sharing, "We have a very competent set of staff from my perspective, and I have learned that when they say they have done their due diligence, they have."

Needs and Demand

The findings shed light on the organization's approach to funding and its effectiveness in addressing the needs of the workforce. An administrative staff member stated, "We fund to fulfill a need," and emphasized the importance of identifying the shortfall and working to fill all or part of that remaining need. Common statements included, "Where's the shortfall and how can CCX, if it falls within our ability and funding areas, then we'll work to fill all or part of that remaining need" and "We vet the applications very well to make sure that the needs are there."

One notable development within the organization is its increased specificity in funding opportunities, making it more responsive to the community's specific needs. To effectively address the various opportunities in the state, the organization has developed different grant programs tailored to fulfill identified needs. As one stakeholder expressed, "We've developed ways to make sure that we're addressing different opportunities that we've seen in the state through different grant programs." Michelle stated:

> We did the "ABC" Initiative in 2020. What we decided then was unemployment was low, labor participation was low, employers needed people. The assumption was everybody who wanted to work was working. We need to go deeper and attract those people who maybe want to work but can't or think they can't. They have barriers. So we did the "ABC" program.

Ross, Bailey, and Truman seconded Michelle's view and stated purpose and innovative stature of the "ABC" initiative in their interviews. Greer also expressed a belief in signature initiatives yet noting the perceived intractability of the problems CCX is attempting to address.

> Because it's like rural is hard. You want to do everything. There's things like the basic water, sewer needs and people can't read and they're living in squalor and they can't have food. All of these things are just hard. That discipline of I'm going to do things I know

how to do better. I'm going to count on everyone else to do their things better too because there are other funders that do things…Everyone's in their lane, not their silo, but their lane. I can look to my left and right and I'm like, I'm doing nothing.

Impact and Outcomes

Participants recognized the importance of being holistic in their approach to project outcomes. "We try to be holistic in the way we think about what the outcomes of the project are going to be," Truman conveyed. The community college system emerged as a potential avenue for achieving desired outcomes. Ashley and Dennis suggested that putting more money into community colleges could lead to greater returns, highlighting the potential benefits of investing in the community college system as a recurring theme. "The sad thing and true thing is you do get more bang for the buck if you put more money into the community college system," noted Ashley. Dennis, likewise, stated, "I think you might get more bang for your money with a community college."

Presenting project information to the board was viewed as a critical step in aligning with funding priorities. Truman explained the importance of responding to the board's established priorities and including information about projected outcomes when making recommendations. The board's active engagement and tendency to ask pertinent questions were seen as positive attributes. Truman reported, "Our board tends to have a lot of questions. And they're aware. They keep track of what we've done in the past, which is really I think, great. They ask us good questions."

Evaluating project alignment with these priorities involved assessing industry needs, skills gaps, and the capacity to draw students into training programs. Greer highlighted the need to deconstruct complex issues and avoid being paralyzed by the perceived difficulties associated with rural projects. Expressing it this way, she stated:

> I think the more we can all kind of focus on deconstructing things, sometimes it's just not as hard as, things that don't have to be this hard. I also think sometimes my colleagues will get paralyzed around rural is so hard. Everything is so hard. There's so many problems. Why are we focusing on this when there's this, this, and that? We're not going to be a funder of all things. We're not going to fix every problem.

Several participants acknowledged the limitations of not being a funder of all things and the impossibility of fixing every problem.

Participants expressed a need for clear objectives, measurable results, and project feasibility and impact evaluation. Additionally, the ability to provide a training program to close the skills gap and attract students was considered crucial. Michelle stated:

> Program officers and directors are looking at applications and talking to the applicant, we're looking to see, does this project have the potential to yield any of these outcomes that are important? Okay, so that's the crux of the decision.

These factors served as primary questions in determining the potential impact of a project.

Strategic Direction and Focus (priorities, vision, mission, goals)

A significant theme emerged in analyzing the collected data: the importance of leveraging data for strategic planning. Charles, a key participant in the study, highlighted the board's role in approving the strategic plan and priority outcomes for CCX, with input from staff. He elaborated further that the board wanted to develop a long-term strategic plan several years ago, not to alter the organization's mission but to increase its impact, efficacy, and efficiency in accomplishing its mission. Charles emphasized the mission itself did not need to change; rather, the focus was on maximizing impact. The long-term strategic plan aimed to identify priorities, funding areas, and desired outcomes. Charles understood the significance of proactive measures and visibility for achieving these goals. Therefore, he underscored the need to enhance communication and the strategic development initiative to align with the organization's mission and increase its impact. "So enhancing our communications, enhancing our [custom initiative] of how we go about achieving the mission are some of the things that I've tried to move forward," stated Charles. By delineating these strategies, the board can ensure the long-term success and sustainability of CCX.

The strategic plan assessment also aimed to identify areas where change and incorporating new ideas and approaches were necessary. Charles mentioned several potential strategies being discussed, such as supporting professors at community colleges who actively recruit students to complete the program. This example highlighted the foundation's interest and its focus on fostering a well-prepared workforce. Looking ahead, Charles expressed hope that the board's next strategic planning phase would involve delineating specific proactive strategies.

Overall, the findings underscored the significance of the foundation's strategic planning. The input from Charles shed light on the board's role in approving the strategic plan and prioritizing outcomes. The discussions surrounding the long-term strategic plan and the foundation's assessment process also provided insights into the organization's desire for increased impact and the exploration of new ideas. The potential strategies mentioned by Charles further demonstrated the foundation's commitment to supporting specific initiatives and its anticipation of future planning phases. The strategic plan serves as a roadmap for decision-making, enabling the organization to focus on priority areas and achieve its mission more effectively.

Sustainability

Multiple participants highlighted the concept of sustainability. Michelle stated, “We look for sustainability. That’s a key factor.” Ike declared:

> What’s the sustainability of that program going to be? How are they going to sustain it? Because if we give an infusion of money, is it going to go away, or do they have the funds down the pipeline to do that?

Ashley added that they look for red flags surrounding sustainability in applications and funding requests. Participants stressed the need for initiatives that can continue functioning beyond the initial funding period.

Michelle pointed out that when considering a position, knowing the program's sustainability is crucial. Financial support for infrastructure, equipment, and initial operational costs of programs is essential. However, the emphasis is not solely on providing one-time expenditures; rather, there is a strong emphasis on long-term impact and self-sufficiency. Charles contributes, “Again, how is the project going to be sustainable? Once our dollars have been deployed? How does that that project continue on?”

Collaboration and Flexibility

In the data analysis, several key themes emerged regarding the strategic approach the participants took in engaging with other entities and organizations. One participant, Truman, emphasized the importance of looking strategically at the various opportunities available. Several participants emphasized the strategic approach they employ in exploring opportunities. Truman further stated, “So they’ve been looking strategically at those opportunities. I think we’ll probably start looking at different ways to engage with organizations.” These practices suggest a proactive mindset in seeking out potential avenues for engagement. Truman’s indication that

CCX would begin exploring different methods of engaging with organizations, implied a willingness to adapt and experiment in order to achieve CCX's goals. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of their efforts was underscored by Bailey, who mentioned that involvement spans levels. "It's a very collaborative effort... from the staff level to the board level", according to Bailey.

The decision-making process was described as a collective conversation involving all relevant parties. The emphasis on collaboration suggests a participatory approach in decision-making and a recognition of the value of diverse perspectives. Moreover, Truman emphasized that the engagement process is characterized by collaborative conversations involving all relevant parties. This inclusive dialogue aims to reach a consensus-based decision on the recommendations.

The involvement of Charles throughout the process is crucial in ensuring his comfort with the recommendations before they are presented to the board for consideration. Truman clarified his own primary responsibility in this process is addressing the board's priorities, underscoring the importance of aligning engagement efforts with the board's objectives. In order to fulfill this role effectively, he ensures that comprehensive discussions occur regarding each project.

Truman also described the staff's responsibility in scrutinizing projects in detail to comprehensively understand how projects will be implemented. This scrutiny includes examining aspects such as collaborations, use of funds, and expected outcomes. By asking probing questions, Truman plays a critical role in ensuring that the organization is well-informed about the various dimensions of a project before making decisions.

Collaboration

Charles highlighted the importance of being aware of funding opportunities offered by other philanthropic organizations, even if they do not directly align with the CCX Foundation's priorities. Charles conveyed:

> And I think it's good for us to know what the funding opportunities are other philanthropic organizations, whether they directly align with us or do not directly align with our funding priorities. Because again, the more we know about other philanthropy, opportunities in the state, we are able then to help those entities that may have a good project but not a CCX project, know where they might want to reach out to.

This knowledge enables CCX to guide fund-seeking entities toward more suitable funding sources, fostering collaboration and support beyond CCX's immediate focus. Charles further expressed the need for breaking down silos between CCX and other philanthropic organizations and grant-making departments in the state and federal government. Although efforts have already been made, he emphasized the necessity for further progress. Participants expressed a desire for enhanced coordination and cooperation to avoid overlapping efforts and ensure that actions are complementary. Often different agencies develop similar strategies due to their shared understanding of the issues, problems, and available data on the same.

Participants emphasized the value of working together with other organizations to bridge the gap between the skills required by the job market and those possessed by individuals seeking employment opportunities. One participant stated, "We collaborate with them to develop training programs that are relevant and responsive to the needs of employers." This collaborative approach ensures that training programs are effective and aligned with industry demands, as Charles reported.

Finally, the concept of expanding the scope of beneficiaries beyond the most visible group, traditional community college students, was highlighted. Ross acknowledged the importance of expanding beyond traditional community college students. Ross emphasized the evolving landscape and the need to align with organizations like the Lumina Foundation and other intermediary organizations to serve a broader population.

Ambiguity-Flexibility and Adaptation-Evolution

Greer declared, “We don’t have a formulaic approach to grant making. We’re not going to do formal checklists. We don’t do scoring.” Similarly, Truman confirmed CCX’s review process does not involve predefined questions or checklists. Instead, applicants are required to submit forms that inquire about outcomes, allowing the organization to assess their application against program objectives. “We just have to be flexible enough to deal with a variety of situations,” Truman commented. For example, Charles mentioned the organization’s engagement in career awareness work, even extending to middle school students, to provide them with a vision of future career opportunities paying a living wage. Additionally, the organization has undertaken programs to reach individuals beyond middle and high school, addressing alternative strategies for meeting emerging needs and expanding beyond traditional pipelines, as Charles and Greer shared.

Ross raised a key issue regarding the growing demand for individuals with industry credentials beyond high school but less than both a four-year degree or a two-year degree. Meeting this intermediate-level education demand poses a challenge for future workforce requirements. To address this challenge, Ross suggested developing shorter-term programs, such as eight-week or one-year programs, to equip individuals with the necessary skills to meet the emerging demand for skilled labor. Ross further proposed working backward from industry statistics to identify educational gaps and determine how to provide the necessary training to bridge those gaps. Ross acknowledged the foundation’s growth over the years and emphasized the importance of evolving toward economic development and expanding human service development. The organization’s accountability for its funding is acknowledged, and Truman mentioned the serious approach taken to ensure responsible allocation of resources.

In summary, the participants in this study highlighted the importance of fluidity in aligning funding priorities with emerging needs. They emphasized the organization’s flexibility and its ability to pivot and respond quickly to changing circumstances. The need for reevaluation and flexibility in strategies, as well as accountability, evaluation of project outcomes, and adaptation of approaches, was stressed. The foundation’s commitment to staying informed about emerging trends and changes in the job market is evident through actively seeking stakeholder feedback to ensure its programs' ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

Outlier Data and Findings

The findings from the current study shed light on various aspects of the decision-making processes of a philanthropic foundation in funding community colleges. Surprisingly, the researcher did not anticipate certain comments and factors revealed during the study. Participants were willing to consider projects that may not fit within the foundation's immediate funding scope, indicating their openness to diverse initiatives. This quality was regarded as valuable, as participants recognized the potential benefits that may arise from projects that initially appear outside the organization's traditional focus.

Furthermore, the need for expanding the foundation's focus and taking risks was emphasized by both board members and staff. One board member highlighted the importance of getting outside of their comfort zone and increasing funding at the community college level.

“Those areas where I think CCX needs to expand our focus to more risk-taking and getting a little bit outside of our box we've been in, and it could potentially be more funding at the community college level,” stated Dennis. Lance echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the need to take bigger risks in order to have a greater impact, particularly in underserved areas, sharing, “I think we’re too risk averse.” Contrarily, a staff member stated, “Yeah, I am all for the community college system, but I don't know how you find the balance." The community college system receives support from various sources, but finding the right balance was seen as challenging.

In summary, the unexpected findings underscore the importance of the foundation's willingness to consider diverse projects, expand its focus, and take calculated risks. Additionally, establishing signature projects with clear evaluation criteria and managing external influences are crucial elements to ensure effective decision-making and maximize the foundation's impact in supporting community colleges.

Research Question Responses

The central research question and the two sub-questions will be addressed in this section, utilizing the data codes and themes identified in the previous section to provide comprehensive answers. Qualitative interviews were conducted with key decision-makers, relevant organizational documents were analyzed, and several non-participant observations were conducted to gain insights into this complex process. The data collected from these methods shed light on the factors and considerations influencing funding decisions.

Central Research Question

How do decision-makers employed by or serving on the board of a philanthropic foundation decide to fund community colleges and community college-focused IOs? In light of the research question, it became apparent that decision-makers within philanthropic foundations adopt a specific approach to funding education initiatives. The foundation does not support projects solely to enhance education outcomes without a broader purpose. Michelle further emphasized that their projects with community colleges are focused on the priorities of CCX. Ericson (1990) states that the education, social, and economic systems are interconnected and interwoven. The growing demand for educated individuals motivated these decision-makers to explore ways to meet this need. Ross also raised the question of how to meet the growing demand for individuals with higher education. These participant perspectives indicate that priorities and mission-related objectives primarily drive the foundation's funding decisions.

A collaborative effort characterizes the decision-making process within the philanthropic foundation. The decision-making process involves reviewing recommendations from the staff, engaging in discussions among board members or subcommittees, and reaching a consensus. The final funding decisions are made collaboratively at the board level. Bailey emphasized that the process involves reviewing proposals and recommendations received from staff, which are then collectively presented to the board or relevant subcommittees for discussion. Additionally, the board sets priorities that guide the evaluation and selection process, providing clear guidance for decision-making.

Sub-Question One

How do philanthropic foundation decision-makers describe the processes to implement funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs? Decision-making is an iterative and reflexive process, going back and forth between staff and obtaining board input and guidance and then back to staff before presenting a final recommendation. Questions about project capacity, sustainability, and alignment with the foundation's mission may arise during the review process. Participants described the need to seek clarity on these aspects and ensure that the project outcomes align with the board's desired outcomes. Decision-makers actively seek clarity and alignment with the foundation's mission and priority outcomes. Decision-makers assess how the applicant intends to utilize the funds and evaluate whether the proposed projects align with these priority areas. If a project's outcomes do not align, further discussions may be initiated to explore possibilities for it to be considered within the foundation's scope. Striving for clarity and exploration reflects the foundation's focus on specific outcomes that the board seeks to fund, underscoring the importance of alignment. This approach ensures that the decision-making process focuses on achieving the desired outcomes and advancing the foundation's goals.

The decision-making process begins with a thorough review of the grant applications. Evaluation of grant applications is carried out with a clear understanding of the foundation's priority outcomes. Decision-makers emphasize the importance of understanding the intended outcomes of the funding and ensuring alignment with the foundation's purpose. One participant highlighted that they take the time to carefully read through the applications and assess whether proposed projects meet their opinion of the foundation's mission. Additionally, the board's agreement is sought to carry the decision forward, indicating that it is not a mere rubber-stamp operation.

Sub-Question Two

How do philanthropic foundation decision-makers describe their strategies in implementing funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs?

The decision-makers emphasized the importance of selecting projects that align with their funding programs and expected outcomes. They stressed the need for quality projects that fit within the foundation's mission. One participant mentioned the significance of overcoming day-to-day challenges in community college success, highlighting the importance of providing flexibility in funding to address emergent issues and support wraparound services. One participant recognized the challenges in ensuring that awarded funds directly benefit community college students and expressed the need to strengthen the connection between the foundation's funding and the students' access to it. Regarding implementation, the focus is on conducting outreach endeavors to inform prospective candidates about available funding opportunities effectively. This process entails various initiatives to disseminate relevant information regarding funding prospects and motivate potential applicants to engage actively. The foundation places great emphasis on ensuring that interested individuals possess the requisite knowledge and are inspired to submit their applications. By actively involving and communicating with potential applicants, the foundation endeavors to attract project proposals that closely align with its mission and areas of priority. Maintaining a proactive and forward-thinking approach enables the foundation to exert influence over projects and guarantee their compatibility with its overarching objectives and priorities.

Increasing access entails exploring ways to improve awareness and distribution mechanisms to ensure the funds reach the intended recipients. This adaptability ensures that the foundation's funding efforts effectively meet the needs of the community colleges and their students. The foundation's board-level discussions contribute to shaping its funding priorities. Board members share suggestions and provide input, helping establish the foundation's focus and desired outcomes. This collaborative process allows the foundation to set priorities that align with its mission, shape custom projects, and respond to the community's needs. Engagement with major stakeholders emerged as a key strategy for the foundation. CCX decision-makers wanted to be involved in the early stages of innovative ideas and initiatives rather than joining projects at their conclusion. Overall, the foundation's strategies in implementing funding to community colleges and community college-focused IOs involve selecting projects that align with funding programs and expected outcomes, collaborative efforts, evaluation and recommendation processes, and implementing specific strategies.

Summary

Through document analysis, staff and board member interviews, and non-participant observations of a foundation staff recommendations meeting, a board of director's program committee meeting, and a full board of directors meeting, an abundance of data was collected that offered a wealth of information about the decision-making process of CCX. The main themes that evolved during data collection were mission and priority alignment, collaboration and flexibility, impact and outcomes, due diligence, and needs and demand.

Many participants emphasized engagement with key stakeholders, proactive involvement in projects, and a thorough evaluation of the organizations seeking CCX funding. The participants also recognized the importance of right-sizing expectations and fostering discussions at the board level to effectively shape CCX's funding priorities. The Garbage Can Model provided a theoretical framework to understand these decision-making processes' complexity and non-linear nature.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this single case study was to explore the decision-making processes of 10 decision-makers employed by or serving on the board of CCX Foundation, a philanthropic foundation that funds community colleges. This chapter begins with a summary of the study's findings as set out in Chapter Four. Following a discussion of the findings, the following study-affiliated topics will be addressed: (a) interpretation of findings concerning theoretical and empirical concepts found in the literature, (b) theoretical, empirical, and practical implications, (c) limitations and delimitations of the research study, and (d) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Since the purpose of this study was to discover how the CCX Foundation makes decisions on funding community colleges, it was necessary to investigate these practitioners' perceptions. Due to the desire to explore a current phenomenon within its authentic setting, a qualitative, exploratory, holistic, single case study design was employed, as suggested by Yin (2018). The participants of this study were staff and board members of a philanthropic foundation that provides funding to community colleges. Ten participants were interviewed and shared their perspectives, experiences, and thoughts on the decision-making process and grantmaking strategies at the philanthropic foundation. The participants were assigned pseudonyms aligned with their age and gender. A single interview of each participant was conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed by this researcher. In addition, this researcher analyzed several organizational documents provided by the staff and information discovered within documents available on the CCX website. Non-participant observations were also conducted in several meetings with staff and the board.

Interpretation of Findings

The data collection and analysis process was guided by the central research question and two sub-research questions. I utilized the interpretations of the themes to explain the answers to the research questions further, explore the study's implications, and propose future research suggestions. This section begins with a brief summary of thematic findings as discussed in Chapter Four, followed by a series of interpretations deemed significant by the candidate.

Summary of Thematic Findings

A set of three main themes emerged from the analysis process. The prevalent themes were factors based on mission and priority alignment, strategic direction and focus, and collaboration and flexibility. Participants noted a laser focus on the foundation’s vision and mission when addressing mission and priority alignment, the first emergent theme. Alignment is mandated between the proposed funded project and the priorities and goals as established and shared by the board of directors in the strategic plan and during meetings. Board members identified their need to see the alignment before approving a funding request. The alignment objective focused on projects that aligned with the organization’s needs and objectives. In addition to focusing on alignment, participants shared that they focused on the impact that CCX funding would have and the actual outcomes being sought.

Every participant used the term “due diligence” to describe their process of investigating the feasibility of a project seeking funding. The due diligence process involves thorough scrutiny to ensure the proposed project aligns with the intended implementation. Due diligence plays a critical role in recommending projects to the board, ensuring their alignment with CCX’s priorities and the presence of tangible outcomes. Due diligence involves extensive evaluation, including meetings with applicants to understand their projects better.

Although CCX aims to support innovative initiatives, identifying board-determined priority outcomes is crucial in project selection. The identification of priority outcomes played a central role in the evaluation process. Staff members use the mission, priority outcomes, and appropriate funding requests as guidelines to narrow down project selections. Without at least one of the identified priority outcomes, unless the project is extraordinary, it is unlikely to be competitive due to the abundance of other projects that align well. These quotes highlighted the thorough application vetting process to ensure the identified needs are legitimate.

The second theme highlighted the strategic direction of the CCX Foundation. Charles stressed wanting to "leverage impact of CCX dollars". Staff emphasized that projects and requests not strategically aligned with the foundation's mission and priorities were unlikely to be funded. The third theme produced was related to collaboration and flexibility. When describing the importance of being flexible and collaborating, it was revealed that the process and strategies are ambiguous, and the foundation strives to adapt and evolve internally and externally. However, even with this focus and a strategic plan, decision-making can still be challenging, and staff members are occasionally required to exercise their judgment in making final determinations on recommendations. Drilling down, as described by Greer, and clarifying priority focus empowers staff members to ask relevant questions during their evaluations and become more comfortable in making recommendations. Foundation staff was adamant that although they had high-level guidance and guardrails on aligning with the mission, they recognized that there were diverse ways to achieve its mission and that being flexible and creative was part of their process. Staff and the board members shared that the foundation was adapting and evolving in its approach to accomplishing the mission though funding, including becoming more proactive and increasing outreach to find problems to solve.

Status of Beneficiaries in Decision-making. Although the organization's current target audience has primarily been focused on traditional populations, there is recognition of the need to expand to non-traditional populations to meet future industry demand effectively. By focusing solely on the traditional community college student population, organizations risk limiting the diversity and growth of professionals in various fields. “It's okay for the applicant to be focusing on a particular population, but we focus on the outcomes as opposed to the population” Truman conveyed. Edgecombe (2019) argues that investing in community colleges and the students they serve is crucial to the nation's vitality and resilience. Several CCX interviewees believed that CCX may be missing people that have fallen through the proverbial cracks and not maximizing impact by reaching these people because CCX has not broadened its perspective. CCX could also assist community colleges and the community by being more direct in targeting the citizens that benefit from particular programming. By adapting its view of how to achieve impact through community college funding to include casting a wider net to challenge funded entities to harness hidden factors, CCX could increase success in meeting its goals.

According to Fleishman (2007), foundations and the organizations they support collaborate to consistently reshape society, including the redistribution of power, authority, and wealth. Although the expansion to reach non-traditional populations is still in its preliminary stages, there is a growing understanding that it must be considered. The challenge lies in devising strategies catering to traditional and non-traditional populations, aligning with the projected future industry demand.

The risk-averse stance of CCX was noted as an issue by two participants. Mangold (2019) encouraged American foundations to expedite their shift in thinking to fund the riskier, seemingly unlikely, public higher education institutions. To address this, the organization has introduced innovative initiatives such as the "ABC" program. The organization ensures a thorough evaluation of applications, conducts comprehensive analyses of the supply and demand sides, and recognizes the importance of expanding target audiences to meet evolving industry demands.

Emergent and Adaptive Grantmaking. According to Grover and Miller (2018), insufficient funding reached a critical point for community colleges, making them vulnerable and hindering their ability to promptly address the demands of the local and regional workforce and economic needs due to these resource deficiencies. This process highlights the organization's emphasis on being flexible and responsive to various situations and emerging needs. The report by Scott and King (2019) states that adaptive philanthropy involves building connections, making swift decisions, prioritizing learning over compliance, and utilizing diverse funding approaches. This flexibility in the grant-making process allows the foundation to consider a variety of projects and assess their alignment with program objectives. The organization exhibits the ability to pivot and respond quickly to emerging needs, suggesting a dynamic approach to addressing changing circumstances.

Although accountability for the provided funds is essential, the organization aims to balance this with the openness to reevaluate and explore different approaches. In the study conducted by Coyte et al. (2013), the participants expressed their intention to consider the potential risks and benefits while evaluating grants carefully. Ashley shared this concern about balance. Collaboration plays a significant role at CCX, particularly in developing training programs that cater to employers' needs. This outreach and collaboration implied a shared responsibility and the involvement of multiple internal and external stakeholders. The findings suggest that the participants adopt a strategic and collaborative approach in engaging with other organizations and entities. Overall, the participants highlighted CCX's strategic focus, collaborative decision-making process, and the role of thorough inquiry and understanding in addressing the board's priorities. They actively seek out opportunities, engage in collaborative conversations, and strive to reach consensus-based decisions. These insights shed light on the depth of engagement and careful consideration that goes into CCX's decision-making and project evaluation processes.

Coyte and colleagues noted that making grantmaking decisions required high attentiveness and thoughtful deliberation. The findings in this study supported this. Due diligence is taken seriously, and funding is carefully considered by staff and the board of directors. Although not much care was stated for individuals, the participants expressed extreme care and concern for the community colleges, the economic status of rural communities, and the state as a whole.

Analysis revealed the importance of fluidity in aligning funding priorities with emerging needs within the grant-making process discussed by the participants. The foundation demonstrated a fluid, adaptable approach in aligning funding priorities with emerging needs. This flexibility allows for a more nuanced and creative evaluation of grant applications. However, this need for alignment with established priorities poses a tension between innovation and alignment, as creative approaches sometimes fall outside the scope of what has been traditionally funded.

Importance of Storytelling. CCX's storied and esteemed history imparts meaning to staff and board members and a sense of legacy, great importance, and significance in the projects CCX funds and supports. The board's awareness of past projects and ability to track progress allowed for holistic, thoughtful, and informed decision-making. Benjamin (2010) claimed that funding decisions entail consideration of reputation, belief, and relationship.

Sustainability and long-term impact are intricately linked to the distribution of grants to community colleges. The participants in this study emphasized the necessity of sustainable projects that can create a lasting influence. According to Deil-Amen (2020), a notable proportion of contemporary college students are choosing to commence or continue their higher education journey at community colleges nationwide. Initiatives that play a pivotal role in meeting the Board of Directors' priorities and aligning with the mission of CCX shed light on the essential facets of within community college programs, explicitly recognizing the underlying issues and barriers that impede success in these educational environments. This dual focus ensures a comprehensive approach that effectively matches the supply of skilled individuals with the demand from employers.

Evolving Strategies and Processes. CCX staff recognize the significance of broadening their scope to meet the changing needs of communities. The foundation maintains its relevance and effectiveness by staying informed about emerging trends and changes in the job market. To ensure the effectiveness of its programs, the foundation actively seeks feedback from various stakeholders, including program participants, employers, and community leaders. This feedback serves as a valuable resource. These findings underscore the importance of being informed about funding opportunities, breaking down organizational silos, fostering collaboration, and broadening the focused-upon beneficiaries.

Although the organization does not have a dedicated evaluation staff, the participants acknowledge the importance of collecting and analyzing data across programs to understand their impact better. CCX has evolved into a more data-driven organization from its origins and is moving to more intensely and intentionally evaluate and track performance data. Incorporating data into future strategic plans is seen as an aspiration, as it would enhance the foundation's effectiveness and inform decision-making processes.

An emphasis on proactive planning indicated a shift toward a more intentional approach to addressing CCX's priorities. There is a recognized need for reevaluation and flexibility in strategies, with participants stressing the need for reevaluation and flexibility in strategies, considering opportunities and outcomes while being open-minded. The foundation staff engages in discussions with the board to explore different strategies and create opportunities for reevaluation while remaining responsive to change. Despite these discussions around adaptability, the organization traditionally funds community colleges, indicating the foundation's commitment to adaptation while supporting established institutions. This aligns with Sands (2022) finding that foundation's focus and recognition of the dynamic character of challenges increased alongside some continued reliance on traditional, methodical approaches.

Prioritizing of Impact. Another significant aspect highlighted in the findings is the importance of sustainable projects with long-term impact. Analyzing projected job growth and required skill levels makes it possible to identify industries and areas where workers are needed. The findings underscore the need to tackle the root causes of obstacles and suggest a broader approach by CCX and clear commitment to ensure program effectiveness beyond surface-level concerns. The nonprofit sector (including donors) must shift from short-term remedies to longitudinal, comprehensive, and multidimensional methods to address wicked challenges (Jones, 2018). The viewpoints shared by several CCX staff and board members reflected the desire to fund projects that have lasting effects and can contribute to the community's and the state's economic development beyond short-term solutions.

The interviews yielded consistent insights that underscored the significance of clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and the ability to assess the feasibility and impact of proposed initiatives. Participants stressed the importance of developing sustainable solutions and ensuring the long-term success of funded programs, extending beyond the initial influx of CCX funds. Moreover, the findings indicate a comprehensive approach to project evaluation and a strategic allocation of funds to maximize their impact.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The results of this study have implications for philanthropic foundation and higher education policy and practice. Philanthropoids, foundation boards of directors, and community college staff all have roles to play in student and community economic success. Due to societal disinvestment and systemic inequalities based on socioeconomic status and ethnicity, community colleges have been subjected to devaluation, disadvantage and labeled as being in a stigmatized position of inferiority (Clarke & Hamilton, 2018; Edgecombe, 2019; Toth et al., 2016).

Community colleges must tell their story and engage with and establish long-term relationships with foundations. Some implications include increased intentionality on the part of community colleges. Other implications include broadening and deepening the understanding of the role of community colleges in society and communities and the multilevel and multi-institutional changes within both entities. In a study, Walton (2019) highlighted the need to examine the intersection between philanthropic foundations and community institutions. Networking and collaboration were seen as needed to implement the needed changes. When philanthropic foundations establish networks, they need to consider the well-being and ability of those networks to maintain a dedicated pursuit of goals (Lynn et al., 2021). The implications for policy and practice are explained in further detail below.

Implications for Policy

In their study on the community impact of performance-based funding models, Li et al. (2018) reached a meaningful conclusion, emphasizing the crucial attention policymakers should dedicate to rectifying the longstanding issue of inequitable allocation of funds to community colleges. Their findings shed light on the cost-effective nature of these institutions as a means of attaining desired outcomes. Similarly, Espinosa et al. (2019) argued that the persistent disparities in educational opportunities necessitate a shift in priorities for organizations funding higher education institutions, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of community college students. It becomes imperative, therefore, to thoroughly assess funding mechanisms to ascertain their efficacy in promoting the principles of "equity, efficiency, and student success" (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 129).

The complex challenges that foundations tackle and the interconnectedness of societal institutions present obstacles to straightforward solutions or approaches (Toepler, 2022). As aptly expressed by Greer, "It is all hard." When grappling with complex issues, leaders within the nonprofit sector must elevate the sophistication of their thinking and carefully assess their approach to the problem and its resolution (Jones, 2018). It is important to recognize that rural, urban, and suburban community colleges may not equally require or benefit from the same strategies, policies, practices, priorities, or proposed solutions. Toth et al. (2016) stress the need for policies affecting community colleges to consider crucial factors such as social classism, family assets, and wealth. In her work "Supporting Exceptional Community Colleges," Sedlak (2019) highlights the exceptional nature of the community colleges participating in the conference, setting them apart from the norm. By examining and studying the practices of these exceptional community colleges, other institutions, and their supporters can maximize their impact.

Implications for Practice

Enhancing coordination might help maximize the collective impact of CCX initiatives. Some participants expressed a lack of empowerment in the process and that some decisions were inevitable. The findings in this study could assist leadership at the foundation in inquiring about what could help staff feel more empowered and that their work was not predetermined or performative. The findings indicate a recognition of the underlying challenges affecting success with community college programs. By revealing some of the thoughts and thinking that CCX experiences, other funders could possibly broaden how they approach community colleges, scaffold those supports, and increase the impact and success of initiatives for community colleges. Fletcher (2018) observed that community colleges faced difficulties as they encountered reductions in state financial assistance while striving to meet the substantial expenses associated with workforce development programs.

CCX Foundation might be able to promote effective opportunities within community college settings by increasing its efforts and strategies to partner with other funders and other entities, including community college-focused IOs. Stepping outside of staff and board members' comfort zones could potentially attract more partner funders and enable the foundation to make an even more meaningful difference in the state's rural counties. In addition, the findings revealed the significance of creating signature projects.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The foundation upon which this study is based is the garbage can model of organizational decision-making, combined with a comprehensive review of existing empirical research. The literature review delved into various aspects of organizational decision-making, shedding light on advocacy and adaptive strategies employed by philanthropic foundations. It also explored the dynamics of philanthropy as a field and the specific needs and societal contexts surrounding community colleges. Data collected through interviews, observations, and documents were compared. In this section, I discuss the data, drawing connections to the empirical and theoretical literature.

Furthermore, I highlight this study's unique contributions to the existing body of knowledge. Notably, recent research has exhibited a notable inclination toward exploring the interplay between theoretical frameworks and practical applications in the realms of strategy and decision-making (Boesso et al., 2017; Celep et al., 2016; Scherer, 2017). Notably, the findings of this research align with the empirical and theoretical underpinnings discussed in Chapter Two.

Theoretical Implications

According to Kavvas (2020), the study of foundations requires a theory that recognizes the influence of changing circumstances. According to Cohen et al. (1972), these organizations frequently search for problems to solve and employ individuals who actively seek tasks to accomplish. Cohen et al. (1972) defined organizations as decision opportunities within an organized anarchy encountering choices. The Garbage Can Model, a theoretical framework explaining organizational decision-making processes, offers insights into the complexity and non-linearity of organizational decision-making. There has been a lack of focus on ensuring fair financial distribution for community colleges (Kolbe & Baker, 2019).

According to this model, decision-making is characterized by ambiguity, randomness, and the convergence of multiple streams of problems, solutions, choice opportunities, and participants. This theoretical framework aligns with the observed decision-making processes within the philanthropic foundation, characterized by complex problems, fluidity, ambiguity, varied goals, and the involvement of multiple actors. The decision-making process is collaborative and involves the assessment of community college programs based on various criteria.

This collaborative approach ensures transparency and allows decision-makers to engage in conversations and ask questions of one another. Transparency and open dialogue among board members contribute to the decision-making process. Through participant interviews, document analysis, and observations, it was discovered that the decision-making process of CCX Foundation involved many of the characteristics suggested by the Garbage Can Model and GCM provides a theoretical framework that helps explain the complex and non-linear nature of CCX's decision-making processes.

Empirical Implications

In their research on the roles of community college boards and community college foundation boards, Craft and Guy (2019) determined that depending solely on conventional funding sources was misguided, given the complex and rapidly changing needs of community colleges and their students. Several CCX participants believed that rigid adherence to limits such as geography and dollar amounts could be barriers to accomplishing goals and missions. According to Lynn and colleagues (2021), certain internalized mechanisms within organizations can hinder and restrict their ability to be agile and adaptable. CCX recognizes several barriers, including geographical limitations and timeliness. Emergent strategy acknowledges that a visible course of action transforms over time as initial objectives collide with and adjust to changing circumstances (Kania et al., 2014).

Over the course of a decade, Haddad and Reckhow (2018) note that philanthropic funding for community colleges has transitioned its emphasis from access to a model centered on success and completion. Even with the shift from access to success, decision-makers acknowledged the need to right-size expectations. A CCX staff member recognized that even a 50% completion rate in certain programs could be considered a success, given the challenges the target population faces. This adaptive perspective acknowledges the obstacles individuals may encounter and adjusts the definition of success, setting realistic goals for the funded projects. CCX's acknowledgment of the need to change and adapt the definition and perception of success for funded projects included level-setting for expectations. This means that a 50% graduation might be a success, if a much smaller percentage of this demographic had achieved the particular goal in the past.

Leat et al. (2018) provided a cautionary note that implementing an adaptive strategy may not be feasible for a specific measure of grantmaking. However, they emphasize the importance of grantmakers acknowledging the potential for diverse outcomes due to various contextual factors. CCX, by its adaptive view of success, aligns with Leat et al.'s finding through the openness to unique yet successful outcomes. Furthermore, community colleges have not prioritized establishing enduring connections with donors, which leaves them at a disadvantage compared to four-year colleges when it comes to long-term fundraising efforts (Smith et al., 2018). Michelle urged community colleges to develop their narrative and to tell their story.

Charles noted the high turnover in community college presidents as a challenge. The lack of story and the churn of presidents could be a barrier to building sustainable relationships and projects. Given the potential of philanthropy to enhance and support institutional progress, the urgency for community colleges to engage in fundraising has become evident, emphasizing that these institutions can no longer disregard philanthropy (Craft & Guy, 2019).

According to Wilson (2021), community colleges were not originally designed to serve as pathways for upward social mobility or entry into higher social classes. Instead, their primary purpose was to supply the labor force for the marketplace. CCX does not currently fund general education outcomes at community colleges. Perhaps, Wilson's assertion and CCX's policy are not necessarily bad. Not everyone wants to attend a four-year college or get a bachelor's degree. The data and findings revealed that the jobs that community college prepares for the economy are important and essential jobs. There could be a reverse argument of elitism against Wilson (2021). It is possible that this attack is reverse elitist and discounts the value of welders and plumbers. COVID-19 should have revealed that these workers are valuable and needed in society. Moreover, the purpose of public and elite four-year colleges and graduate schools also includes providing labor to the market with a whiter collar and higher salary.

In order to delve into the core underlying causes of complex and intricate societal challenges, organizations must embrace the implementation of adaptive and emergent philanthropy within their strategic frameworks and decision-making processes (Elson et al., 2020). Kania et al. propose the notion that emergent strategy necessitates ongoing environmental awareness, ensuring that resources are allocated to areas with the highest potential. This environmental sensing also facilitates a more intuitive comprehension of how the various components of the system are adjusting in response to unexpected inputs and external circumstances. Essentially, within the framework of emergent strategy, opportunities are recognized and capitalized upon without complete certainty about the resulting outcomes.

Participants from CCX shared that they explore various avenues to identify the needs and challenges that could be addressed through CCX funds. According to Lynn et al. (2021), the adaptable and flexible approaches observed in emerging and adaptive philanthropic organizations are indispensable for tackling intricate, persistent, and demanding issues. Community colleges face complex and formidable challenges in their interactions with philanthropic foundations, particularly when compared to other higher education institutions, as highlighted by Clarke and Hamilton (2018). To uncover the underlying causes of complex and subtle societal challenges, foundations need to adopt adaptive and flexible approaches in their philanthropic strategies and decision-making processes, as emphasized by Elson et al. (2020). Essentially, within the framework of emergent strategy, the focus is on perceiving and utilizing potential opportunities without having a guaranteed understanding of the results (Kania et al., 2014). This ties back into GCM's theory on decision-making as well.

Leat et al. (2018) state that major foundations are shifting from supporting individual organizations to promoting systemic change at the field level. The shift from individual community colleges to community-college focused IOs was not shared or found at CCX. Michelle added that she would like to see teamwork and collaboration between multiple community colleges to broaden the impact of CCX funding. These small clusters of community colleges working together could be seen as IO adjacent entities. According to Forde (2019), there is a growing trend among foundations to allocate their resources toward intermediary organizations that operate within the policy realm across multiple institutions. Ross mentioned

Lumina Foundation and Michelle mentioned several other community-college focused IOs, as potential partners and doing similar work to CCX.

Lynn et al. (2021) explain that emergent philanthropy utilizes financial resources effectively to enhance organizational networks. Michelle advised that she was interested in recipients' efficient and effective use of CCX funds, which she believes would be increased by recipients collaborating together. As stated by Kania et al. (2014), foundations adeptly transform existing networks and harness the momentum of those changes. Perhaps employers and governmental agencies in communities operate as IOs as well. They bridge and translate the longitudinal needs to CCX and CCX reacts faster than the state can or the actual community colleges can.

Scholars widely acknowledge that philanthropy plays a crucial role in shaping the landscape of higher education, as evidenced by Haddad's (2021) research findings. Haddad and Reckhow (2018) further support this notion, highlighting the significant impact of philanthropic contributions on higher education institutions in the United States. Michelle has also observed the philanthropic sector's keen interest in funding educational initiatives. The funding provided by CCX is instrumental in determining the educational paths pursued by community colleges, guided by market dynamics and the stated needs of employers. Haddad (2021) argues that foundations actively assume the role of proactive agents, driving strategic initiatives and acting as catalysts for systemic change, rather than merely functioning as detached sources of funding. This perspective marks a transformative shift within the field. Notably, the prevalence of truck driving, welding, and nursing programs across multiple community colleges reflects the tangible influence of CCX funding. A key factor behind the shift towards prioritizing policy over capacity building is the apprehension regarding labor shortages (Haddad, 2021; Philanthropy Roundtable, 2019). In response to the shortage of skilled workers, there is a macroeconomic need for community colleges and vocational training sites to produce trained employees (Scutari, 2019). Labor shortages are a mission-critical aspect of CCX funding and priorities. The important role that community colleges play in addressing previous and ongoing workforce shortages can be seen in the grant-giving initiatives of foundations and related organizations.

Throughout the years, there has been a noticeable and consistent shift away from simply offering charitable donations to institutions. Instead, these organizations have taken an active approach by delving into exploring and resolving the root causes behind intricate issues, adopting a remedial stance (Ellsworth & Lumarda, 2003; Harvey et al., 2019; Prewitt, 2006). Charles, in particular, avoids using the term "grant" as it carries connotations of charity. The focus of CCX lies in achieving desired outcomes and meeting predetermined expectations. CCX has recently introduced news releases highlighting its role in funding specific projects rather than providing grants for them. Unfortunately, funders often fall into the trap of oversimplifying logic models, failing to recognize the intricate interplay between nonprofit, for-profit, and government entities. This interplay significantly influences the actual outcomes witnessed in real-world scenarios (Kania et al., 2014). Unlike advocacy work involving policy, CCX operates in an adaptive and emergent manner. Nevertheless, the CCX personnel and board acknowledge the intersectionality between the economic, social, and educational domains and actively engage in addressing complex and intractable problems such as rural flight.

The evolution of strategies and outreach methods, along with the challenge of aligning them with an unchanged mission, brings to light the fluidity and uniqueness of the process. The Garbage Can Model (GCM) acknowledges and elucidates this fluid nature. Coyte et al. (2013) noted that participants perceived grant allocation decisions as highly subjective. They characterized the process as peculiar, involving a delicate balance and combination of factors. Ross mentioned that they often ended up aligning with the board's preferences. Several participants at CCX also expressed a sense of inevitability regarding certain funding decisions.

Erfurth and Ridge (2021) assert COVID-19's impact on giving by philanthropy, and the role of philanthropy increased due to the pandemic. Moreover, Lynn et al. (2021) highlighted how several funding organizations encountered difficulties in attributing significance beyond the mere act of granting funds, particularly as the significance of strictly regulated strategic concepts waned during the COVID-19 era. Greer proposed the elimination of applications altogether. These individuals, who bear the responsibility of foundation decisions and are sometimes referred to as philanthropoids, sought to justify their distribution of grants based on empirical evidence, despite the daunting task of evaluating numerous applications (Coyte et al., 2013). Likewise, Greer emphasized the importance of consistency, treating similar cases equally, and the influential nature of establishing precedents in decision-making. Similarly, Greer also asserted the need for consistency and treating like things like 'like' things and the power and import of setting precedents in decision-making.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses or issues within the study, outside the control of the researcher, which have the capacity to jeopardize the internal validity of a study (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A limitation of this study was being a single-case case study investigating a single philanthropic foundation. This limited the sample size. The individuals involved in the study shared their experiences and perspectives through a single, individual interview, non-participant observations, and documents. Participants may not fully disclose perceptions and factors infusing their decisions. Lastly, another limitation was that although all participants expressed care and familiarity with the needs of community colleges, only two of the participants had attended a community college.

Delimitations are the boundaries determined by the researcher, having the potential to impact the external validity or generalizability of the results (Ellis & Levy, 2009; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Generalizability is constrained in case studies (Yin, 2018). A delimitation of the study was not knowing the participants prior to interviewing. Perhaps having had a preexisting relationship would have allowed for a deeper conversation on the negative aspects of the decision-making process. The focus on funding community colleges and being decision-makers limited the selection of participants. Lastly, the selection of GCM as the theoretical framework was a limitation. The phenomenon under study may have been better understood using a different theory or adding a theory, such as complexity theory from the organizational sciences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Organizational decision-making by philanthropic foundations is an important topic and deserving of study. Although insight has been provided into the process and strategies the CCX foundation used to fund community colleges, the paucity of the extant literature necessitates additional research. Therefore, conducting a qualitative, multiple case, case study of the various different types of foundations' processes for decision-making, including corporate foundations, family foundations, community foundations, or mega-foundations, might add to the literature on philanthropic foundations and organizational decision-making. In addition, the community colleges funded in this study were rural. CCX focuses on rural community colleges and the findings may not apply to funding suburban or urban community colleges. Further exploration into the funding of suburban and urban community colleges by philanthropic foundations is also needed. The study did not take into account the viewpoint, perspectives, or experiences of the funded community colleges. Future research could specifically focus on how rural community colleges engage with philanthropic foundations when seeking funding for non-workforce or skilled trade focused programming to improve understanding of their expectations and resources.

A phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of rural community college presidents receiving funding from philanthropic foundations could reveal the factors these individuals consider impactful. A future quantitative study could include research into the correlation between philanthropic funding of community colleges and the impact on students' earning power or average community wages. Lastly, several participants referenced COVID-19; it could be informative to quantitatively examine the impact of COVID related decreases in enrollment on funding by foundations and COVID's impact on community college and foundation programmatic funding shifts. These additional focused areas of study could provide valuable insights into the decision-making processes and potential challenges community colleges and foundations that fund them face.

Conclusion

Education holds a paramount position in today's society, encompassing crucial facets of life. Within this realm, community colleges assume a pivotal role by extending employment and educational opportunities to a wide variety of students. Nevertheless, these institutions often grapple with financial limitations that curtail their capacity to provide these opportunities. Furthermore, community colleges face the challenge of serving and representing the needs in their communities. Effectively conveying their value and elucidating the opportunities they offer becomes arduous when they encounter inadequate funding or fail to be perceived as a priority to philanthropic entities. Within this intricate landscape, the notions of collaboration and storytelling emerge as a promising solution for community colleges to surmount these financial constraints. These institutions can navigate the challenges more effectively by providing a clear narrative of their impact and pooling their collective resources. The significance of fostering collaboration among community colleges and funders becomes apparent as a means of maximizing the utilization of available resources and cultivating a thriving educational and economic environment in communities. Ultimately, for these institutions to understand the nuances of giving by foundations will assist them in acquiring the funding they need to support their mission concerning the students they serve. Lastly, philanthropic foundations are urged to be adaptive and resilient in considering how to accomplish their missions and to maximize their impact in society. CCX is optimistic and pragmatic in pursuing its goals. I am profoundly moved by the simplicity and beauty that was shared by the CEO that CCX's passion is to help people find work because a job is simply dignity, hope, and opportunity. This simple goal is at the heart of the work that CCX supports and funds. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for CCX and other philanthropic organizations seeking to maximize philanthropic impact and address the evolving and complex needs of communities, community colleges, and potential students.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Date: 2-14-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-733
Title: GRANTMAKING DECISION-MAKING OF A PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATION FUNDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE-FOCUSED INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY
Creation Date: 12-15-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Tanya Giovanni
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	**Review Type** Exempt	**Decision** Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member Dina Samora	**Role** Co-Principal Investigator	**Contact** [redacted]
Member Tanya Giovanni	**Role** Principal Investigator	**Contact** [redacted]
Member Tanya Giovanni	**Role** Primary Contact	**Contact** [redacted]

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Email

CCX FOUNDATION

Dear Sir or Madam,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree. The title of my research project is GRANTMAKING DECISION-MAKING OF PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATIONS FUNDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE-FOCUSED INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY and the purpose of my research is to discover and understand how philanthropic foundations fund community colleges by exploring the decision-making processes of the foundation leadership.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at the CCX. I would be requesting access to individuals in leadership for one on one semi-structured interviews. Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. I would also be requesting non-participant observational access to two staff meetings, and the opportunity to review minutes and other archival documents and artifacts. The study will implement anonymity and maintain confidentiality in accordance with Liberty University's IRB protocols and human subject research ethical requirements. The name of your organization would only be shared if you requested it be made public and only with your express written approval and only after you reviewed the final version of the study.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. To facilitate your response and to honor your time, language for a permission letter is included below for your convenience, should you elect to grant me permission.

Sincerely,

Tanya Wightman Giovanni, Esq.
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
Liberty University

Appendix C

Billups (2021) Observation Rubric for Formal Settings

Relates to:	Participants (1)	Topics/content (2)	Attributes/characteristics of behavior	Nonverbal cues
Setting, field location				
Demographics (place, time, locale, weather)				
Member characteristics (dress, language/jargon, rituals, ceremonies, symbolism)				
Group interactions and behaviors, tone/mood				

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

Length of Activity: 90 Minutes Activity type:____ Activity location: ____ Activity date: ______________ Time of activity: ____________ Activity length: _____________ Description and purpose of the activity:	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
General: What are the experiences of private philanthropic leadership teams as they decide on providing funding in higher education and especially to community colleges?	
See office layout and comments about physical setting at the bottom of this page.	
Descriptive Notes	

Appendix E

Site Approval

12/15/22, 3:12 PM Mail - Giovanni, Tanya Wightman - Outlook

[External] Permission for Tanya Giovanni to conduct research at the [redacted]

[redacted]

Thu 12/15/2022 1:12 PM

To: Giovanni, Tanya Wightman <tgiovanni@liberty.edu>

Cc: [redacted]

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Dear Ms. Giovanni

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Grantmaking Decision Making of Philanthropic Foundations Funding Community Colleges and Community College-Focused Intermediary Organizations, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at our organization.

Please follow up with my colleague [redacted] on next steps.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Project: Grantmaking Decision-Making of Philanthropic Foundations Funding Community Colleges and Community College-Focused Intermediary Organizations: A Case Study
Principal Investigator: Tanya Wightman Giovanni, Ph.D. candidate, Liberty University
You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 and either employed by a philanthropic foundation in a decision-making or serve in a leadership role.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project. I am a doctoral candidate in the school of education at Liberty University and I am completing this research as part of my doctoral degree.

The purpose of the study is to explore the decision-making processes of decision-makers employed by or serving on the board of a philanthropic foundation that funds community colleges and community college-focused intermediary organizations. A philanthropic foundation will be researched to discover the processes utilized and reveal the how of these funding decisions and processes. The processes involved in the decision-making of a philanthropic foundation when deciding to fund community colleges and community college-focused intermediary organizations will be outlined.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. I will ask the consenting participants to join me for face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews in their offices or a conference room at the foundation site. The interviews will be scheduled for 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription of the data. Your answers will be kept confidential and the findings will not disclose your identity. The researcher will also take written notes during the interview.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Your responses will provide valuable information as this study is designed to discover the processes used by members of the leadership team in deciding to fund community colleges and community college-focused intermediary organizations. The benefit to society is that community colleges serve a significant number of students across the country and are important institutions.
The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher, the researcher's committee chair, and the researcher's committee members will have access to the records.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Written notes will be kept in a locked file drawer where only the researcher has a

key to access the files After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all written documents will be confidentially shredded.

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher and the researcher's committee will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in observational group settings. While discouraged, other members present in the observational setting may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

The researcher conducting this study is Tanya Wightman Giovanni. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Dina Samora, at [redacted].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

____
Printed Subject Name

____
Signature & Date

Appendix G

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your association with the CCX Foundation and how long you have been connected with the institution.

2. Please share your educational and career journey with me.

3. Please describe your involvement in the decision-making process at the foundation. Moreover, who else participates in this decision-making process, and how so?

4. Please describe the step-by-step process and procedures for grantmaking decision-making.

5. Please describe any other separate processes (formal or informal) involved in the decision-making process.

6. When deciding which beneficiaries (or target population) to support, what are some of the main factors that the foundation takes into account?

7. What is the role of the perceived need of the population or vulnerability?

8. Please share some future directions in which the foundation may be headed concerning community college giving.

8A. Please share some changes over the years in the foundation.

> This question was added after the first interview of Charles. Charles was the only participant to not be asked this question.

9. We have covered much ground in our conversation, and I appreciate the time you have given to this. One final question… What else do you think would be vital for me to know? Please share any final comments if you would like.