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**How a Mindfulness-Based Professional Development Program Supports More Ethical and
Equitable Philanthropy**

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Abstract

Philanthropy serves a vital role in the United States, bringing resources and support to a vibrant field of nonprofit organizations serving community needs. Despite its noble goals to better humankind, philanthropy often does harm through its grantmaking practices, perpetuating hierarchical power structures and inequity, and exacerbating the wealth and income gap that increasingly divides the country. This paper examines the structural, systemic aspects of philanthropy that foster potentially harmful practices and highlights ethical challenges in the field, and then demonstrates how mindfulness offers a means of countering those challenges to support a more ethical, equitable, and effective sector. A mindfulness-based professional development program for philanthropic practitioners is proposed as a means of effecting transformative, positive change in the field, supported by research that directly links mindfulness practices to intervention points in philanthropy.

How a Mindfulness-Based Professional Development Program Supports More Ethical and Equitable Philanthropy

Philanthropy, a love of humankind, seeks to promote the well-being of others, often through charitable giving to individuals or organizations providing services that benefit a community (Ylvisaker, 1982). In the United States philanthropy has grown into a large and professionalized field comprised of individual and institutional donors that contributed over \$470 billion to charitable causes in 2020 (Giving USA, 2021). However, while the definition of philanthropy and its altruistic goals imply inherent good intentions, the field has long presented ethical dilemmas and challenges, leading critics to question whether philanthropic practices are equitable or even effective in accomplishing their goals. Given its size, its pivotal role in society and direct impact on peoples' lives, it is important to understand if indeed philanthropy effectively fulfills its role to the benefit of the communities from which its resources are drawn.

This paper examines the field's ethical dilemmas and criticisms and suggests how mindfulness practices might ameliorate shortcomings in the philanthropic sector. I begin with a discussion of mindfulness and its potential benefits, followed by a brief overview of philanthropy which highlights the systemic conditions in the field which drive its practices, present ethical challenges, and potentially impede its effectiveness. (A full description of the philanthropic field, including historical context, is provided as Appendix A). Next, I draw upon research in the field to demonstrate how mindfulness practices relate to challenges in philanthropy and suggest that introducing such practices to philanthropic practitioners will support a more equitable, ethical, and effective sector. Finally, I propose a professional development program for philanthropic professionals which integrates mindfulness skills development with group discussions and other activities that encourage self-reflection, open dialogue about the philanthropic field, and more

conscious, compassionate practices by grantmakers.

While I conclude this paper with a proposed mindfulness-based professional development program for philanthropic professionals, I do not view mindfulness simply as a useful tool or add-on that promotes better philanthropy. Rather, I see mindfulness in its ethical context of a Buddhist practice as aligning with the goals and values of philanthropy. To act philanthropically, one is acting in a manner consistent with the Buddha's teachings of personal ethical conduct and the alleviation of suffering. Thus, mindfulness practices and philanthropy are – or should be – one and the same. The field would be significantly improved if practitioners recognized that connection and were shown how mindful philanthropy applies in their day-to-day work.

Positionality

I came to my thesis topic with significant personal interest and over twenty years' experience as a philanthropic professional. I was not trained or educated in philanthropy but rather came to it from the finance field, driven by the desire for a more fulfilling career focused on community and helping others. I learned about philanthropy “on the job,” but not from other foundation staff or philanthropists. Instead, I learned more by spending time with the leadership and staff at organizations which sought our funding. Through them, I better understood the needs and challenges in the community, and how charitable contributions were a vital source of support for their work. Most importantly, I learned from them how those charitable dollars could be a double-edged sword, as satisfying donor demands often undercut organizational efficiency and drove resource allocation in ways that did not prioritize community needs.

I left my first position as Executive Director of a large foundation in New York City because I felt that in my role as a grantmaker I was not really helping people, but rather serving as the conduit between my extremely wealthy trustees and the dedicated nonprofits doing the

actual work. I returned to philanthropy somewhat reluctantly after ten years as a stay-at-home mom because I had to support my family, and philanthropy was the most solid piece of my resume. I was fortunate to find a position with a local family foundation which aligned with my personal values and my understanding of how our practices could best support the community we sought to serve, although the shortcomings in the field discussed herein became even more obvious as we worked so closely with our grantee partners.

My assessment of the philanthropic sector is harsh, but it is how I feel based on my direct experience. I am decidedly biased and prone to extreme views, so mindfulness has been valuable to me as a personal practice and as a means of keeping myself in check. As a privileged, cis-gender, White female with no direct life-experience with the difficulties suffered by the people served by our grantee partners, I am part of the problem about which I have experienced shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Again, mindfulness practice has been my go-to coping strategy.

Pursuing a degree in the Mindfulness program at Lesley has brought me to where I am now. The coursework for Mindful Leadership and Mindfulness and the Environment in particular opened my eyes and mind to how my chosen field often does harm, exacerbating the very conditions we seek to alleviate in our community. Serving as a donor, volunteer and board member of nonprofits was not enough to mitigate my feelings of culpability as a philanthropic leader, and I recently resigned my position. Working on my thesis helped me process much of what I was feeling and gave me direction, as I concluded that I have unique experiences and perspective to bring to this field, and that rather than reject it I may instead engage in the hard work of trying to make philanthropy better.

Mindfulness Practices and Potential Impacts

Mindfulness has grown in popular discourse, especially over the past decade, expanding from its application in clinical settings to increasing practice by the general public, despite there being no consensus on a definition of mindfulness or its practices (Van Dam et al., 2018). Khong (2021) further elucidates that the growing popularity of mindfulness has engendered a variety of definitions, with mindfulness and meditation practice being promoted principally in scientific terms. Bayot et al. (2020) likewise note that in the contemporary, Western context, mindfulness is a bit of a buzzword not fully understood to be a specific practice grounded in the Buddhist traditions. A commonly given definition in the growing body of research of mindfulness, derived from its early introduction as a physical and mental health intervention by Jon Kabat-Zinn, is “moment-to-moment awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, in the present moment, as nonreactively, nonjudgmentally, and open-heartedly as possible” (Van Dam et al., 2018, p. 3). Again, however, absent universal acceptance of a definition for mindfulness, it may best be considered an umbrella term describing both a mental state and the related practices which cultivate that state of attention and awareness.

While I draw upon a body of research to support my argument that mindfulness would improve philanthropic practices, I recognize the limitations and shortcomings of that research (e.g., varying definitions of mindfulness, isolating the impact of mindfulness practice from other factors, and reliance on self-report measures) as discussed thoroughly in a review by Van Dam et al. (2018). Nonetheless, independent of the need for more rigorous scientific study to confirm some of the claims about mindfulness’ benefits – particularly for clinical interventions – I believe mindfulness supports more ethical philanthropy as it aligns with what philanthropy purports to be and to do. Best stated by Khong (2021):

Mindfulness is grounded upon and embedded within an array of teachings and practices, all intended to afford the individual a way to live a life of nonharming, love, kindness and tolerance, to take the personal responsibility for reducing one's suffering, and the social responsibility to alleviate the suffering of others. (p. 28)

For purposes of this paper, wherein I propose mindfulness training as a means of changing potentially unethical and inequitable practices in philanthropy, I look to the qualities most cited in the literature related to the impact of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) on individuals' behavior and decision-making, in addition to their potential for increasing compassion, self-compassion, and improved individual well-being.

Awareness

Foundational to mindfulness practice is the development of awareness, characterized by qualities such as bare attention, present-centeredness, attentional regulation, and a state of mind characterized by nonjudgmental awareness (Bayot et al., 2020; Khong, 2021; Orazi et al., 2021). Note that the term awareness here is specific to an individual's mental state of attention and discernment to experience, rather than a general awareness and/or acknowledgment of what is going on in one's environment or the state of affairs in the world, even if cultivating mindful awareness may eventually lead to a more open-minded external worldview. As a personal practice, mindfulness promotes conscious awareness of one's feelings, desires, motivations, and other "powerful but hidden processes" that may be referred to as one's conditioning (Kramer, 2002, p. 4). This is important, as such conditioning promotes reactive behavior driven by unconscious, unrecognized factors rather than deliberate, rational choices that align with one's goals and intentions.

A review of the literature by Bayot et al. (2020) demonstrated that mindfulness training increases spiritual awareness, deep listening of others, generosity, and compassion as well as enhanced present moment awareness, emotional balance, and acceptance of the self. Shapiro et al. (2012) concluded that mindfulness develops the awareness and potential for self-reflection that encourages conscious choice about conduct and behavior, while Orazi et al. (2021) noted that mindful individuals become more aware of moral rules or cultural standards, making them less likely to engage in actions that go against such rules (e.g., perpetuating racism and inequity with discriminatory practices). Further, Gentina et al. (2021), found that intentionally drawing one's attention to situations and developing awareness promotes an ethical response. Therefore, cultivating mindfulness may not only increase our capacity to self-reflect and see the experiences of others, but also increase the likelihood that we will react positively, with kindness, compassion, support for those in need, and an authentic desire to rectify wrongs and injustices.

Compassion, Empathy, and Well-being

The growing body of mindfulness research finds increased empathy and compassion outcomes from MBIs beyond the therapeutic interventions for clinical populations, which were the focus of much earlier studies, and has broadened impact assessments on such “softer” effects as improved relationships and friendships (Oyler et al., 2022). Williams and Polito (2022) suggested that with mindful awareness, individuals are more receptive to cues from others and that this generates a greater capacity for empathy. Such conditions, in turn, lead to more positive relationships and pro-social behavior resulting from increased compassion for others. Pertinent to this theory, a study by Bayot et al. (2020) found that an ethics-based mindfulness training program lowered participants' emotion suppression when exposed to suffering strangers (which alludes to compassion), and that a standard mindfulness training program increased altruistic

behavior. Further, a review of the literature by Orazi et al. (2021) included consistent findings that mindfulness fostered empathy and enhanced physical and emotional well-being. Finally, studies cited by Gentina et al. (2021) found:

Mindfulness cultivates compassion, openness, generosity, and kindness, contributes to intrinsic and other-oriented values, and curbs materialistic and hedonistic values...relates to basic psychological needs, including autonomy, relatedness, and competence, and negatively correlates with impulsiveness. . . . Thus, mindfulness promotes healthy, relational behavior, and reduces suffering derived from cravings. Individuals with high mindfulness are less materialistic than those with low mindfulness. (p. 305)

Ethical Beliefs and Behavior

Research indicates that mindfulness supports social-oriented values. In a study by Gentina et al. (2021), an MBI using Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training lowered avaricious monetary attitudes, thus improving consumer ethical beliefs (p. 318). Further, numerous studies indicate that positive affect developed by mindfulness practice encourages pro-social behavior, such as helping, generosity, and altruism (Bayot et al., 2020; Williams & Polito, 2022), and that higher empathy associated with positive affect serves to bring awareness to the needs of others and to how one's behavior impacts others (Zolotoy et al., 2021). Similarly, Orazi et al. (2021) cited studies indicating that mindfulness develops positive cognition that supports moral reasoning, thus increasing practitioners' understanding of and respect for social norms (p. 785), rationalizing the hypothesis of the authors' own study which concluded that mindfulness training promoted other-focused ethical behaviors.

While bias may not necessarily lead to unethical behavior, too often it does encourage unfair treatment of others, discrimination toward targeted populations, and prejudicial behaviors.

Recent studies have shown that MBIs are associated with reduced bias and discriminatory behavior and may be more accessible to wider populations than prejudice-reduction programs with an explicit focus on bias (Oyler et al., 2022). Orazi et al. (2021) found that mindfulness reduced bias in decision-making, while Williams and Polito (2022) hypothesized that mindfulness supported reductions in biased thinking by interrupting automatic response tendencies through enhanced awareness and broadened cognition. The authors further noted that increased awareness cultivated by mindfulness permits greater objectivity, with judgments less likely to be based on prior assumptions.

Connection, Self-Compassion and Resilience

Bayot et al. (2020) emphasized the ways in which core Buddhist ethical concepts are promoted by mindfulness practice, including “the realization of common humanity . . . and interdependence between all sentient beings” (p. 6), supporting the hypothesis that mindfulness training would enhance individuals’ sense of connection to the wider community. While empirical data reviewed here did not demonstrate a *causal* relationship between mindfulness and sensed interdependence, other related demonstrated links are encouraging. For example, meta-analyses have shown that MBIs reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, and enhance self-esteem and well-being (Shapiro et al., 2012).

The growing number of mindfulness programs for non-clinical populations in diverse settings from schools, corporations, government agencies and municipalities indicate the interest in and desire for strategies that help people cope with the stresses of daily life (Cavanagh et al., 2018). These programs could be particularly helpful and appropriate for developing resilience and have been shown to improve self- and emotion regulation (Oyler et al., 2022). Specific to the purposes discussed more fully below – that is, making significant changes to the practices and

power dynamics in philanthropy – mindfulness has been shown to lower reactivity and self-defensiveness in the face of criticism, encouraging objectivity rather than habitual response to emotional triggers (Williams & Polito, 2022). Thus, mindfulness both lays the foundation for self-awareness and provides tools for coping with discomfort which may accompany increased awareness of negative feelings, emotions, and personal characteristics.

Philanthropy and the Role for Mindfulness

The definition of philanthropy implies that charitable giving is motivated by love and caring rather than some baser motives (Ylvisaker, 1982), resting upon integrity, honesty, and reciprocity, and committed to ethical practices (Roberts, 2006). Stewart and Faulk (2014) specifically highlight reciprocity, the mutuality of charitable giving through which nonprofit organizations receive funds to support their work and donors receive something in return, such as gratification from supporting others, the joy of giving, or an overall sense of satisfaction from doing “good works.” From a more cynical view, donors also receive direct personal benefits from their generosity, including public recognition and approval, assuagement of guilt about being privileged, “white-washing” a negative corporate image, and the benefit of sheltering wealth from taxation (Theodossopoulous, 2016). Others contest the mutuality of giving, as it is unidirectional from the haves to the have-nots (Giridharadas, 2020; Villanueva, 2018), and I believe the complicated nature of this relationship contributes to the most problematic aspects of modern-day philanthropy.

Ethical Considerations and Challenges

From its earliest roots, philanthropy was imbued with virtue and a widely held assumption of its innate value and ethical intentions, while at the same time Aristotle acknowledged its potential to promote inequity and elitism, a means for the haves to justify their

privilege by giving back to the have-nots in their communities (Liu & Baker, 2016). Critics then and today argue that philanthropy is but a softer form of capitalism which has normalized socio-economic and racial hierarchies, treating certain people as less worthy (Villanueva, 2018). U.S. philanthropists have typically been viewed with suspicion, their motives questioned, although only recently has the ethics of philanthropy emerged as a field of academic inquiry and the dominant narrative of philanthropy's inherent virtue subjected to critical review (Harvey et al., 2021). Villanueva (2018) articulates an increasingly common theme, calling philanthropy "a living anachronism. . . . adamant that it knows best, holding tight the purse strings. . . . a fantasy of entitlement, altruism, and superiority," often creating "division and suffering rather than progress and healing" (p. 3). Likewise, growing consensus in the field that private foundations are most problematic has been well-expressed by Reich (2016):

For starters, foundations represent, by definition, plutocratic voices in a democratic society committed, at least in principle, to the equality of citizens. But the strangeness of the foundation form goes far beyond this. The modern philanthropic foundation is perhaps the most unaccountable, nontransparent, peculiar institutional form we have in a democratic society. (p. 67)

At heart, these are issues of power, wealth, and inequity, and the ways in which philanthropy – dominated by those with wealth and power – perpetuates systemic inequities to the detriment of the public good. That this indulgence of the rich is subsidized by the tax-paying public simply adds insult to injury (Horvath & Powell, 2016).

Power, Wealth, and Inequity

Growing income and wealth inequalities in recent decades, during which private foundations and their endowments also grew rapidly, have heightened scrutiny of the

philanthropic sector and intensified claims that grantmaking foundations focus more on protecting their power and privilege than supporting the public good (Azevedo et al., 2021; Finchum-Mason et al., 2020; Harvey et al., 2021). A review of the literature by Liu and Baker (2016) identified the need for more rigorous assessment of the philanthropic sector, charging that far from merely maintaining the *status quo*, philanthropy in fact reinforces and magnifies existing power structures, social injustice, and economic inequality: “Philanthropy is the conversion of wealth into recognition, prestige, and reputation, which subsequently allow the philanthropist to obtain greater wealth” (p. 263).

Current scholars acknowledge that this argument against philanthropy is an old one, noting early work from Oscar Wilde and Karl Marx charging that philanthropy both validates inaction on the state’s part and fails to challenge the systemic inequity that perpetuates the poverty that philanthropy seeks to ameliorate (Theodossopoulous, 2016). But even if the arguments are old, they are held with more urgency and vehemence by growing, increasingly activist voices from both within and outside the field. Edgar Villanueva, a Native American with years of experience at several large, influential foundations, is an engaging, vocal proponent of change from the policies and frameworks perpetuating dominant ideology. These policies vest power in the “haves” who maintain control over funding allocation, and they empower a predominantly white class of “saviors and experts” using hoarded wealth to dominate and control the seekers of funds (Villanueva, 2018).

Villanueva (2018) goes on to say that money is not inherently evil, but rather it is the love of money that makes it problematic, when it is pursued above all else, valued more than human life, and allowed to divide us into hierarchies and an “us-versus-them” mentality. Given that these power structures are deeply entrenched and backed by tremendous wealth, the voices that

call for change seem naïve and perhaps quixotic. But at the core of these structures are “othering” and the myth of rugged individualism dominant in the West and America in particular, fueling a sense of disconnection and separation. The sense of separation is exacerbated by socio-economic hierarchies that lead dominant groups to view themselves as not only different but superior to others, justifying their hold over power and impeding efforts to disrupt existing structures.

Donor Control and Lack of Accountability

Grantmaking foundations have few requirements regarding disclosure and transparency, leading to charges that they are undemocratic (Giridharadas, 2019). Reich (2016) argues that foundations have no competition, as do market-based organizations, nor do they answer to an electorate or outside funders. Thus, they are unaccountable to the nonprofit organizations they support and to the public, which subsidizes their wealth and to whom they should be accountable for how those funds are distributed and spent. Further, foundations are not obligated to report on the impact or efficacy of their grantmaking, contrary to the nonprofit recipients of funds which must demonstrate their worth through often burdensome applications and reporting requirements (Finchum-Mason et al., 2020).

Compounding harmful impacts from lack of accountability is donor control. Philanthropists have unfettered discretion over funding allocations and thus power over grant applicants (Liu & Baker, 2016). In addition to permitting harmful or abusive grantmaking practices (Harvey et al., 2021), this power imbalance cuts off philanthropists from a valuable feedback loop: they rarely receive honest feedback about their practices and relative effectiveness from those organizations which rely upon them for funding. Philanthropic scholarship notes with concern donors who presume to know better than experts and/or the

nonprofit service providers, those who have proven their competence in business and assume they are likewise qualified devise solutions to complicated social problems with which they have little direct experience (Liu & Baker, 2016). Finally, the premise underlying philanthropy's tax deductibility, that forgone public income is outweighed by the benefits of charitable giving, is not supported empirically (Toepler, 2018). Instead, many claim that philanthropists fund according to their own interests, short-changing marginalized communities and the most pressing social needs (Azevedo et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2021).

Lack of Diversity and Representation

Events like the killings of unarmed Black people in 2020 exposed systemic injustice and racism widespread throughout the United States (Azevedo et al., 2021). Together with growing wealth and income disparities, this state of affairs belies the country's own founding principle that all (men) are created equal. This is highly problematic, given that the assumption of equality and value for all lives lies at the core of ethical thinking (Harvey et al., 2021). Because of philanthropy's purported mission to better humankind and its responsibility for ethical stewardship of funds in the public trust, calls for philanthropic leadership to focus on and combat such issues as inequity and social injustice have intensified. Nonprofit leaders and social justice advocates insist that philanthropic organizations must reflect the diversity of the country and the communities in which they work, and the extent to which both their funding practices and their own demographic make-up exacerbate inequity and social injustice.

Azevedo et al. (2021) cited a large body of research finding that diverse groups provide a broad range of knowledge, values, and perspectives, leading to decision-making that should prioritize both the needs and lived experiences of under-represented populations. While Buse et al. (2013) found empirical evidence on diversity in the workplace mixed – both supporting and

undermining effective performance – their own study found the diversity on nonprofit boards improved governance and efficacy. Further, the authors argued that increased diversity would increase the likelihood that an organization’s program services reflected the needs of the community and thus help break cycles of power and privilege in the United States.

Despite evidence that diversity, equity, and inclusion both improve practices and have important equitable implications, achieving broad representation has proven difficult. Recent data found that 85 percent of foundation boards and 90 percent of board chairs were White (BoardSource, 2017), along with 90 percent of foundation CEOs (Council on Foundations, 2021). While the overall makeup of total foundation staff more closely aligns with U.S. labor force demographics, representation of women and minorities in senior and leadership positions continues to lag (Council on Foundations, 2016). This demographic data supports arguments that foundations perpetuate wealthy donors’ power and privilege, a significant ethical consideration. Further, lack of diversity and representation impedes grantmaking effectiveness: if those closest to the pain are best suited to address social problems, why are they excluded from decision-making (Villanueva, 2018, p. 173)?

Implicit Bias

Much of the public discussion of ethics in philanthropy concerns bias, defined by the Britannica dictionary as “a tendency to believe that some people, ideas, etc., are better than others that usually results in treating some people unfairly” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.). Implicit bias is more subtle, “understood as affective reactions that emerge automatically upon encountering a particular stimulus,” and while the term “implicit” is often used interchangeably with “unconscious,” researchers have found that individuals do have access to the content of their attitudes, if not their origin (Cooley et al., 2018, p. 2). As these attitudes exist regardless of

one's motivations, they may lead to explicit expression in the form of overt discrimination and/or prejudice against certain groups despite one's good intentions or personal values of tolerance and acceptance. We all have biases whether overt or more subtle; they may be uncomfortable, but they are inevitable in any society with diverse populations and racial categories (Oyler et al., 2022). What is needed is not to suppress or work to eliminate them, but rather to recognize them and the ways in which they may be actualized by harmful behavior.

While bias may lead one to treat members of "outgroups" more favorably, it becomes problematic when it leads to discrimination toward or mistreatment of others in the form of prejudice, persecution, and regarding them as inferior (Essel, 2018). Specifically related to philanthropy, where donors have complete control over their grantmaking priorities and decisions about which nonprofits are worthy of funding, bias may lead to practices that are both ineffective (funding programs and organizations that are counter a foundation's mission, values, and priorities) and harmful (e.g., perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequity, and short-changing under-represented populations).

Empirical data on bias in grantmaking is limited, although there is a growing body of research addressing the impact of bias on funding decisions. For example, a review by Bhati (2021) found that White and Black participants were more likely to trust members of their own color with monetary stakes, and that participants with higher levels of assessed implicit bias were not only less generous, but more likely to favor their own race or religion when donating, and that lower levels of giving were driven by racially-biased attitudes by Whites that deemed Blacks as morally less worthy of support. These results are highly significant in a White-dominated field like philanthropy, because they predict both discrimination and under-funding of Black-led nonprofits. Indeed, the statistics on how charitable dollars are allocated validate this concern.

Communities of color receive just 8 percent of funding, estimated at a \$2 billion shortfall, and Black-led organizations have 45 percent less revenue and 91 percent less unrestricted net assets than their White-led counterparts (Philanthropy News Digest, 2022) despite significantly greater poverty and funding needs in communities of color. Similarly, Hawk (2015) found that Native Americans receive just 0.03 percent of charitable dollars, while the U.S. indigenous population is close to 3 percent, and Native American communities score even lower than Blacks on every social indicator.

Barriers to Change

Donors and large philanthropic institutions have fought, and continue to fight, decades-long efforts to limit their autonomy, arguing that charitable giving is a private affair, outside the purview of state-imposed strictures and limitations (Ylvisaker, 1982). Since their inception in the early 1900s, private foundations were viewed with skepticism and mistrust, as they provided high-wealth individuals an instrument through which they could exert outsized influence on public policy and in institutions of higher education which received substantial gifts from private philanthropy (Hall, 2006). However, it was not until the 1960s that the U.S. Congress subjected the nonprofit sector to thorough investigation, with foundations receiving most critical scrutiny. The resulting legislation codified and regulated the nonprofit sector with the 1969 Tax Reform Act (TRA), including provisions intended to curb foundations' worst abuses, but critics charge that those provisions fell short of what was needed to ensure a fair and equitable system. Resistance to change persists, as philanthropists believe funds in their charitable giving vehicles are still their money, despite the significant public subsidization of that wealth, and that they should maintain absolute control over its allocation despite growing consensus that such exclusive donor control leads to ineffective and unethical grantmaking practices (Harvey et al.,

2021). Unsurprisingly, then, the TRA was not only the first significant regulation of the philanthropic sector – it was also the last.

In addition to resistance from philanthropists, Frumkin (1998) observed that the sector is structurally insulated from scrutiny and regulation due to foundations' extreme wealth and resources. Further, growing professionalization and bureaucracy in the field has led to increased homogeneity in practices, with foundations often collaborating and operating in lockstep "standard operating procedures." This concentrated wealth creates a monolith of sorts, impervious to reform and seemingly impenetrable to outsiders. Proponents of change are ill-equipped to rationalize their proposals because of insufficient empirical data to validate their arguments. For example, opponents of reform often argue that restricting foundations' autonomy would disincentivize giving, and without valid data, that argument is difficult to refute. But again, given its power and insularity, foundations effectively rebuff substantive study by limiting information shared with the public and refusing to fund research.

Consistent failure of efforts to reform philanthropy for foundations' 100-year history affirms Villanueva's (2018) charge that "despite all their talk of wanting to help, reform, even revolutionize the world . . . [philanthropists] won't touch the underlying system of privilege and power because that's what grants them their status and position in the world" (p. 96).

Interestingly, Finchum-Mason et al. (2020) found that foundations voluntarily adopted practices in line with more equitable, ethical philanthropy when faced with the global COVID-19 pandemic, although they reverted to "business as usual" when the crisis had passed. To me, this indicates that outside of structural and regulatory changes to the sector, the individuals working in philanthropy are both capable and willing to do the right thing. As such, my proposed strategy for meaningful improvement targets those individuals to promote change from within the sector

by offering practitioners the foundational skills through mindfulness that encourage more ethical, inclusive, and equitable philanthropic practices.

Mindful Philanthropy: An Integrated Model

Philanthropy has done and continues to do much good, and with improved practices it could do more and be more effective. Rather than perpetuating inequity and other harmful outcomes of many current practices, philanthropic support can not only address unmet social needs, but also redress previous harms. Villanueva (2018) describes the native American tradition of money as medicine, a means of achieving balance. If the current state of philanthropy is lacking, a “scandal” according to Reich (2016), what would an acceptable model of charitable giving look like? Given that philanthropy is subsidized by U.S. taxpayers, funds held by foundations and other giving vehicles are public funds, in the public trust, and should be responsibly stewarded and deployed in a manner that prioritizes community needs (Reich, 2016; Villanueva, 2018) by donors that conduct themselves with integrity and non-exploitive practices (Roberts, 2006).

Mindfulness practices have the potential to better align philanthropy with its values, mission, and goals, elevating its work and dramatically improving the lives of all it seeks to serve. Specifically, the means of effecting transformational change is in the hands of the professionals who have dedicated their careers to philanthropic good works, and a professional development program founded on mindfulness has the potential to counter each of the ethical challenges and considerations detailed above by influencing the behavior of those engaged in philanthropy. As indicated by literature cited above examining potential benefits of mindfulness, my argument supporting mindfulness as a means of improving philanthropic practices is founded upon the understanding that “central to . . . contemplative and meditative practices is the

intention to develop ethical behavior, morality, and virtue,” and that while rooted in Buddhist traditions, mindfulness “is a universally applicable practice, and a natural human capacity” (Shapiro et al., 2012, p. 504).

The power imbalance between donors and grant seekers enables many of the questionable philanthropic practices which in turn perpetuate that structural inequity. While mindfulness practice cannot directly address such structural, systemic conditions in the field, it offers a first step toward positive change by interrupting donors’ natural tendencies to act in ways that take advantage of those inequitable conditions. Underpinning all mindfulness-based practices is awareness, which by interrupting reactive behavior driven by our underlying conditioning, may promote recognition of our shared humanity, our interconnectedness, a desire to alleviate the suffering of others, and a sense of moral responsibility to better those who are under-represented in our community. Recognizing connection and shared value, philanthropists and grantmaking professionals are more likely to listen to community voices and shift funding to address community needs rather than propping up pet projects of the elite. In addition, shared connection and interdependence encourages inclusion, ameliorating the lack of diversity and representation in the field. This is an important consideration for both equity and effectiveness, as shared decision making supports better practices and more equitable allocation of resources when community members are given a voice (Azevedo et al., 2021).

In the same way, mindfulness discourages harmful practices enabled by donor control. As Villanueva (2018) described the “anxiety and fear that characterizes being a member of the 1 percent” and the isolating effect wealth (p. 139), developing self-compassion and resilience through mindfulness practices helps alleviate philanthropists’ own suffering as it encourages them to alleviate the suffering of others, and sharing power and resources feels less threatening.

Mindfulness is foundational for dealing with emotion reactivity and feelings of vulnerability which would naturally arise as philanthropic professionals examine how their practices may do harm and consider changing the way they are working in philanthropy (Bayot et al., 2020; Zolotoy et al., 2021).

Further, with increased compassion and connectedness with others should come motivation to work proactively for the betterment of humankind: simply refraining from harmful practices is insufficient. To this point, Sofer (2018) argues that fostering empathy and compassion for others and their needs encourages collective action for the benefit of all. Indeed, while the study highlighted above by Bayot et al. (2020) may have shown no overall effect on empathy, the authors did observe increased self-compassion and subjective well-being by participants in an ethics-based mindfulness training. Thus, a mindfulness program could be expected to build philanthropic practitioners' capacity to deal with the fear, stress, and anxiety that might accompany meaningful change in their field.

Research summarized herein indicates direct positive impact from mindfulness on behaviors related to philanthropy and its practices, such as generosity and increased altruism (Bayot et al., 2020), pro-social behavior and other-focused ethical behavior (Orazi et al., 2021), kindness, ethical response and other-oriented values (Gentina et al., 2021), and attunement to the needs of others which directly impacts individuals' behavior toward others (Zolotoy et al., 2021). Research on bias also indicates a direct intervention point for mindfulness practices. How one's implicit biases affect resultant behavior depends in part on metacognitions and personal motivation to avoid negative behaviors driven by bias; further, how strongly one associates oneself with implicit attitudes is a predictor of subsequent behavior as demonstrated by Cooley et al. (2018). Building on previous research of implicit bias and behavior toward gay men, the

authors examined how one's thoughts about their implicit racial biases and the extent to which they identify with them as their own might predict downstream consequences of those biases (i.e., implicit negative attitudes about race becoming overt discrimination, prejudice, or mistreatment).

Cooley et al. (2018) noted that a commonly espoused approach to countering prejudice encouraged people to recognize and "own" their implicit biases as the first step in stemming their potential negative impact, and they tested that hypothesis in studies of Whites' feelings about and behavior toward Blacks after a mindfulness intervention brought awareness to and consideration of their biases. Results showed that participants with high internal motivation for tolerance and acceptance were indeed more likely to express feelings of warmth toward Blacks and willingness to give more to Black charities after deeply considering their own implicit attitudes. Notably, however, for those with low internal motivation to avoid prejudice, considering and owning their bias had the opposite effect: they exhibited higher levels of overt racism and were less generous toward Black charities.

Cooley et al.'s (2018) study affirmed that the role played by cognitive awareness of biases presented an intervention point for mindfulness to promote more ethical behavior. Further, mindfulness practices that develop self-compassion offer a means of dealing with feelings of guilt and self-criticism that may arise when well-intentioned individuals find their implicit biases in conflict with their personal values of tolerance and their internal motivation to avoid prejudice and discriminatory behavior. Finally, Cooley et al.'s (2018) mixed findings related to internal motivations suggest that mindful awareness of bias does not necessarily lead to acceptance or commitment to suppress harmful outcomes, and could instead backfire; however, its potential to mitigate unethical behaviors resulting from bias through developing compassion holds promise.

Discussion

Entrenched “big philanthropy” may be happy with the *status quo*, but it faces intensifying pressure to be better, to be more inclusive, and to support more marginalized populations. Forty years ago, Ylvisaker (1982) stated that “when wealth is translated into organized philanthropy with protected status in public policy, a new set of rules and expectations come into existence, and I detect a new ethical code barking at the traditional culture” (p. 326). Perhaps the time for the traditional culture to heed that barking is at long last here, with mounting pressure from within and outside the sector for meaningful change. The clearly articulated ethical challenges inherent in the sector need not remain intractable.

While increased regulations and structural changes could support more equitable and effective philanthropic practices, there are significant barriers to reforming the sector. And it is not just resistance from private foundations, where those with power and control have resisted giving it up: even proponents of reform are unclear about how best to ensure better practices in the field without unintentionally doing more damage by disincentivizing donors and dampening their generosity. Private philanthropy is a major source of support for nonprofits providing vital services in the community and a valuable partner to the public sector in addressing human service needs, so potential reforms must be carefully considered. However, the lack of empirical data on foundations and charitable giving impedes efforts to craft effective regulatory and policy changes and a new approach is needed.

Looking beyond structural reform, meaningful positive change in philanthropy may be achieved by focusing on the day-to-day work and practices of individuals engaged in charitable giving. Here, the lack of regulation in the field is a benefit: there are no prescribed practices or rules about how and to whom funds should be distributed, or even by whom. Philanthropy is free

to adopt more ethical effective practices and to welcome a diverse, community-centric group of voices into its halls of power. All ethical challenges in the field are within its own control, and practices which may be less effective for positive community impact are determined by philanthropic professionals and their governing boards, not some external regulator.

Focusing reform efforts on the people within the system is both a logical and practical strategy with a high chance of success because those individuals have much to gain from supporting, perhaps even championing, those efforts. The program officers, executive directors and grants managers working in philanthropy are there because they find the work valuable, fulfilling, and rewarding. They find joy in community involvement and relationships with grantee partners, often developing close relationships, and they want to treat their partners with the dignity and respect they deserve. Philanthropic professionals may earn more than the nonprofits they fund, but not substantially so given that foundations are nonprofits themselves; no one is in it for the money. It behooves these committed professionals to ensure that the work they do is effective, has value, and benefits their community, as few would otherwise stay in the field. Further, many of them already see the shortcomings in philanthropy, the ways in which its practices are at cross-purposes with its goals, and they are leading some of the most active change efforts.

If this is true, why are philanthropic leaders not already doing things differently? Some are, to be clear. But others have been slow to follow for several reasons. First, most philanthropic professionals are not the ultimate decision makers, because they answer to their board of trustees. In private philanthropy, boards are often dominated by a single family or connected group of people who provide the funding. These are generous, committed individuals who are largely well-intentioned and want to be effective contributors to their communities, addressing deep-

seated social problems from poverty and racism to educational attainment and criminal justice. Donors and board members, however, tend to be disconnected from the day-to-day work of grantmaking and likely unaware of how its practices may be ineffective and harmful. For example, trustees' efforts to ensure that their giving is impactful may include stringent selection criteria, due diligence practices,¹ and program evaluations that are burdensome to grant applicants/recipients and interfere with their ability to operate successful programs. However, nonprofits are unlikely to share this feedback with foundation trustees either because they have no contact with them, or for fear that they will lose funding as a result.

Second, many philanthropic professionals either do not understand how their practices get in the way of their success and/or cannot see how their field perpetuates entrenched power systems and inequities that disadvantage nonprofits. Philanthropy has yet to become an established academic discipline, although it is included in such other disciplines as public administration, political science, and social work (Fitton, 2012). As such, professionals typically learn about grantmaking strategies and practices on the job, from more experienced colleagues, and through supplemental programs offered by regional grantmaking associations and supporting organizations. This reinforces practices already in place and fails to encourage experimenting with new strategies that upend well-established professional norms in the field. There are notable exceptions, as social justice funders and advocates offer resources and workshops that promote a more equitable philanthropic sector. Nonetheless, grantmakers must be open to accepting criticism of the way have been working before they would commit to adopting new strategies

¹ One caveat: many small foundations are "staffed" by their donors or trustees, functioning less as an organization than as a private giving vehicle. Much of what I am saying about professionals in the field applies to larger, staffed organizations and institutions.

that radically shift power dynamics and entrenched beliefs about how their work should be done. Mindfulness would support such radical shifts by developing awareness and acceptance of the fields' shortcomings, accompanied by practices that help practitioners manage the resulting discomfort and anxiety of recognizing those shortcomings.

Finally, there are those in the field who simply do not accept that anything is wrong, and no amount of self-reflection and awareness will change that. The exploration of bias in grantmaking highlighted the importance of personal motivations in avoiding harmful behaviors and the reality that some people are not interested in equity. For the segment of the field who actively embrace the power dynamics and hierarchies that put them at the top, who scorn the concept of "trust-based philanthropy" and reject the value of community input and shared decision making, change will happen not *with* them, but rather *despite* them.

Believing the latter group is in the minority, I propose that a mindfulness-based professional development program for grantmakers is a critical first step in moving forward, as it would provide the foundation upon which to build new practices. The program need not address philanthropy and grantmaking practices specifically, as professionals will not benefit from simply being told how they should do their work. Instead, the program will focus on increased mindfulness as the desired outcome, as that would encourage participants to evaluate and amend practices on their own.

Specifically, with increased awareness developed with mindfulness training, professionals may reflect more deeply on their work and how it aligns with their personal values and goals. Compassion mindfulness training opens the heart to others' suffering and thus compels individuals to work in a way that alleviates that suffering, even if it means doing things much differently. Recognition that their work is in conflict with their personal goals and good

intentions may be painful, causing stress and anxiety. Mindfulness ameliorates such negative emotions and is a valuable tool for downregulating the nervous system and reducing reactivity in the face of self-criticism. Self-compassion developed with mindfulness is as important here as compassion for others in situations such as this where people are tasked with recognizing difficult truths about themselves and their organization. Finally, mindfulness fosters more positive relationships and builds awareness of our interdependence and connectedness with others. This is vital in a field that needs to tear down a hierarchical system that thrives on feelings of difference and superiority, and for philanthropic professionals to do this work successfully they must do it together. Mindfulness thus brings both personal and professional benefits to a sector struggling to break out of its isolation and join with the communities it seeks to improve. Equally important, mindfulness practices provide philanthropic donors and professionals strategies for boosting their own mental well-being and for managing their fears about change, doing things in new and different ways, and allowing more equal relationships.

As mindfulness must be learned and practiced in order to be effective, I propose that a mindfulness-based professional development program would significantly improve philanthropy. Such training would serve as vital “pre-work” for the many existing training programs promoting best practices in the field, including those on racial equity, diversity and inclusion. Even with entrenched, systemic challenges and structural barriers to change, philanthropic practitioners working together can achieve meaningful, positive change.

Proposal: A Mindfulness-Based Professional Development Program

The proposed professional development program described in more detail below (the “Program”) is intended not as a “how-to” of prescribed best practices for more ethical philanthropy, but rather as a means of integrating mindfulness-based practices into the day-to-

day work of philanthropic professionals. There exists already in the field a host of “best practices” suggested to improve the way donors support non-profit organizations working to address human service and community needs, increasingly categorized as “trust-based philanthropy” (see examples included in Appendix B). The problem is not ignorance of better practices, but instead is one of implementation: consistently, the philanthropic field resists adopting these new practices which challenge the *status quo* and would result in a significant shift in power from those with funding to those who seek resources to conduct their work in the community.

The goal of the Program proposed here is to create the foundation for effecting change by (i) developing awareness that counteracts automatic behaviors and reactivity from one’s underlying conditioning, (ii) encouraging self-reflection by philanthropic professionals about potentially harmful practices in the field and their role in perpetuating such practices, (iii) supporting the development of increased empathy and compassion that would lead to more ethical practices, and (iv) providing participants tools and strategies for dealing with discomfort, stress, and anxiety which may stem from contemplating such significant change.

In the following sections, I will discuss considerations impacting program design, such as accessibility and feasibility, logistics, location, and cost. Next, I will identify critical components to support intended program outcomes. I will not present a specific curriculum or recommend lesson plans. Rather, I believe there are ample mindfulness training programs and curricula available from qualified, experienced mindfulness centers and teachers, and there is no need to recreate already proven effective work. (A sample list of programs is included in Appendix B). I do, however, expand on specific content for the program, particularly for facilitated group discussions and self-practice writing assignments. Finally, I include a list of other resources and

materials which go into the content topics more deeply, and that program facilitators and participants may find useful for further exploration (see Appendix B).

Considerations for Program Design

Program content should be neutral and nonjudgmental, as telling people they are behaving unethically will likely deter some participants and make others defensive and resistant to learning new ways of working. Another key consideration is accessibility to those for whom mindfulness is an unknown or even off-putting concept. Thus, in presenting the Program to potential participants, the focus should be on mindfulness as a means of both improving participants' day-to-day practices and enhancing their own emotional well-being. Program descriptions also should emphasize suitability for those with or without any experience with mindfulness to ensure more widespread interest and participation.

As the term "mindfulness" has become more common, many programs de-emphasize its underlying spiritual tradition in favor of a more secular approach. While this may make the Program more accessible to some, I believe that eliminating the underlying ethical piece of mindfulness weakens its potential impact. A study by Bayot et al. (2020) offered mixed results which neither support nor discourage an explicit ethical component for a mindfulness-based program, and the authors suggested that for some people an explicit ethics focus may lead them to reject such a program. Conversely, Shapiro et al. (2012) argued that even without explicit training in ethics, mindfulness practice would have a positive impact on individuals' moral reasoning and decision-making, and thus its inclusion would more likely encourage one to consider others' well-being. Nonetheless, given that the Program is intended to promote more ethical practices, I believe it makes sense to include topics such as values and ethical behavior

during discussion and reflection sessions even if the ethical underpinnings of mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition are not addressed explicitly.

Accessibility and Feasibility

Program length and duration will impact participation, as working professionals must find time to participate, and the relative benefits of in-person versus remote must be considered. There are pluses and minuses to each, which must be balanced, so the program design proposed here seeks to draw on existing research about proven effective models.

Program Length and Duration. Cavanagh et al. (2018) noted that more intensive mindfulness programs such as MBSR and Mindfulness-based Cognitive therapy (MBCT) combined 26 to 30 in-person group therapy hours over an eight-week period, combined with daily home practice, but that other research found promise in shorter, alternative MBI methods. Regarding program length and follow up, most research cited an eight-week model and stressed that regular practice is necessary for improved outcomes (Bayot et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the review by Cavanagh et al. (2018) found a lack of clear consensus as to the relative importance of intervention duration, frequency or meditation type.

Because this Program targets working professionals, I propose a six-week program of two-hour sessions, accompanied by at-home practice and “homework” such as reading, journaling, and writing assignments. While each component will include new content, consistent themes are included throughout so that missing one or two sessions would not significantly lessen its efficacy. I also propose opportunities for post-program follow-up given that longer term studies such as Gentina et al. (2021) found that the positive effects of mindfulness training wore off after a year.

Web-Based vs. In-Person. While mindful traditionalists may emphasize in-person models, the Program proposed here allows for both in-person and remote delivery of each program module. Web-based interventions are newer to mindfulness practices, but with advances in readily available technology, they are becoming more prevalent. Data from the Office of National Statistics confirms that internet access is widely available and used daily by most people (Moulton-Perkins et al., 2022). Further, as the global COVID-19 pandemic rendered safe in-person programs unavailable for over a year, there is both a greater need for web-based interventions and more information about how they could be implemented most effectively.

Empirical studies of web-based mindfulness programs show promise for such interventions, although there are limitations, mixed results, and clearly a need for additional research. Russell et al. (2018) cited a meta-analysis and review of internet delivery of MBIs for mental health that found beneficial impacts on underlying conditions as well as increased mindfulness, although there was such variability in delivery modes and approach (e.g., phone versus computer, facilitated versus self-guided) that conclusions regarding optimal conditions and program design were not feasible. The authors' effort to fill in those gaps with their own updated review found that web-based MBIs were effective for both facilitated and self-guided interventions.

Finally, a review of the literature by Moulton-Perkins et al. (2022) exploring MBCT and MBSR delivered via group videoconferencing supported its feasibility and acceptability, with modest positive effects on mental health outcomes. The two interventions studied are both intensive clinical interventions, however, so the authors' review excluded less rigorous MBIs for standard non-clinical populations such as the one proposed here as a professional development program. As such, while further research is warranted, there remains sufficient support for both

web-based and in-person delivery of the Program, and to maximize appeal and flexibility, I recommend offering either or both as an option.

Program Implementation: Host Site and Sponsor

Whether in-person or remote, the Program may be most effective and reach a larger group of participants if it is employer-sanctioned. Collectively, work cited throughout this paper supports a workplace-based or employer-sanctioned program, as mindfulness can improve employee morale and relationships with co-workers. For example, Williams and Polito (2022) found that mindfulness increased pro-social behaviors at work, meaning those that went beyond their contractual obligations as employees and benefitted others, such as taking on tasks beyond their own role and expressing altruism toward colleagues. Such behaviors were linked to increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover. In addition, emerging research indicates that younger people in general seek meaningful work, not just a livelihood, so organizations that support employee wellness such as mindfulness programs may be more attractive to new hires and better able to retain workers (Zolotoy et al., 2021).

Indeed, workplace-based mindfulness programs are increasingly common in corporations of all sizes, government agencies, academic institutions, health care providers and municipalities, as employers value their potential impact on psychological well-being and pro-social behaviors (Oyler et al., 2022). If employers view the Program as resulting in not just happier employees, but improving worker productivity and their professional reputation, they are more likely to give employees time to participate and agree to underwrite its costs. Thus, Program materials should highlight positive impacts for the workplace, including increased motivation for ethical behavior, improved consciousness at work, and shared values (Orazi et al., 2021).

Other benefits of a workplace-based program include potential dissemination beyond individual participants, as Fitton (2021) identified how student practitioners passed on their skills and knowledge throughout their own organizations and their professional networks. This is a key consideration for a Program such as this with the lofty goal of systemic change while working through a limited intervention point of individual professionals. Housing the Program within grantmaking organizations may have implications for more widespread impact in the field, encouraging other professionals to seek out such training. Within their own organizations, participants may find that their skills “trickle up” to their supervisors, more senior staff, and even foundation trustees who may be more difficult to engage than entry- and mid-level staff. Finally, offering an in-house program should encourage ongoing practice post-training through a mutually supportive group of colleagues.

Alternatively, the Program may be hosted by a philanthropic resource organization, such as regional associations of grantmakers (which are plentiful nationwide). Whether workplace-based or through a supporting organization, the Program facilitator must be a trained, experienced mindfulness teacher to ensure safety for participants and reduce the potential for harmful outcomes of meditation and other mindfulness activities which have shown adverse effects for certain populations (Khong, 2021; Van Dam et al., 2018). There are a growing number of mindfulness and retreat centers nationwide offering programs to the public, with trained and experienced mindfulness and meditation teachers. Working in partnership with such centers would increase flexibility in Program implementation reinforce confidence in the host site’s qualifications and capacity for offering mindfulness training. Professional mindfulness program providers offer both in-person and online programs, so locations with limited local resources would not be constrained by the need for travel.

Finally, regardless of organizational host and site location, employers should be encouraged to cover the costs of employee participation, just as they do for other professional development programs and continuing education activities. While I do not anticipate high costs (which are ultimately determined by the trained facilitator or host organization), professionals are more likely to participate if Program expenses are not out of their own pockets.

Intended Outcomes

The Program’s overarching goal is to reduce extractive practices “based on the removal of wealth from communities...and the accumulation of wealth by interests outside the community” and increase regenerative practices “based on reflective, responsive, reciprocal relationships of interdependence” (Justice Funders, 2022). While the explicit goal of the Program expressed in presentation materials will focus on developing mindfulness skills, its proposed design, implementation, training methods and content have been selected with an eye toward the longer-term goal of encouraging more ethical philanthropy, which is characterized by:

- Grantmaking practices and policies that are transparent, respectful of the needs of organizations doing work in the community, cognizant of the disparate needs in the community, and that offer support in proportion to those disparities;
- Centering the needs, voices, and leadership of the community – for example, including community voices on decision-making boards with meaningful representation;
- Clearly articulating goals and objectives for funding programs, with built-in monitoring for donors to hold themselves as accountable as they hold their grantees;
- Deploying funds according to community needs rather than preserving capital by adhering to minimum payout rates; and

- Longer term, using the sector's power and privilege to amplify the needs and voices of the community, including advocacy for legislative and policy changes which better address community needs.

For individual participants, the Program is intended to build mindfulness skills in support of improved psychological well-being, including reduced stress, anxiety and reactivity, and improved affect and emotional regulation; increased compassion, self-compassion, and empathy; and increased sense of interdependence and connection to all beings.

Program Components

As stipulated above, the Program will consist of six two-hour sessions supplemented by “pre-work” (readings, videos, audio content, etc., to be selected by the Program facilitator, as well as materials included on the resource list included as Appendix B), home practice, and post-training practice and support. Because there are pre-existing mindfulness-based professional development programs available which may be adapted for the philanthropic field, creating a full curriculum from scratch is not necessary. I anticipate partnering with local mindfulness trainers and organizations with certified professional staff able to offer the Program in partnership with individuals or organizations engaged in philanthropy. The Program Components detailed below have been selected to align with the expected Program Outcomes, with an eye toward accessibility for novice practitioners.

Meditation Practice

Meditation training is an appropriate activity for this Program, as decades of research demonstrate that practitioners achieve significantly higher levels of mindfulness, improved sense of well-being and self-compassion, and decreased negative psychological symptoms (Keng et al., 2011). Meditation is a core component of clinical interventions, such as MBSR and MBCT, but

is applicable to and practiced widely by nonclinical populations as well. Meditation can be adapted to a variety of mindfulness training interventions, with a focus on concentration, awareness, or compassion, and I propose meditation trainings for the Program (below) which relate to developing the specific foundational capacities most likely to promote more ethical philanthropy (e.g., awareness, compassion, connection, self-compassion, and ethical, pro-social behaviors/attitudes). However, the Program implementation should remain flexible as there is not yet sufficient empirical evidence indicating what type of meditation (including duration and frequency of practice) are most effective in achieving desired mindfulness capacity and outcomes (Cavanagh et al., 2018).

Finally, Program meditation sessions may be individual or facilitator-guided, with content selected to reinforce group discussion topics for each Program session, and the activity is appropriate for independent home practice. The wide availability of online guided meditation recordings and phone apps (see Appendix B) ensures an accessible, feasible activity for relatively inexperienced practitioners, and may encourage participants to continue the practice long after Program completion.

Meditation Awareness Training (MAT). MAT is a secularized intervention that is derived from the Buddhist mindfulness meditation tradition. Rather than a standalone meditation activity, MAT includes techniques intended to cultivate patience, generosity and compassion, as well as exploration of Buddhist concepts such as emptiness and impermanence (Shonin et al, 2014). Because MAT is a specific training conducted by experienced meditators, typically over an 8-week period, it may not prove appropriate as a Program Component in its entirety. However, I include it here because an implantation by Shonin et al. (2014) found sustainable improvements job satisfaction and performance, accompanied by lower work-related stress and

other psychological distress, and because the authors noted strong interest by many participants in the Buddhist concepts explored. I believe MAT warrants further exploration to determine if components of the training could be incorporated here.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) and Compassion Meditation (CM). Loving-kindness, derived from Buddhism, describes a mental state of unconditional kindness to others, while compassion is an emotion that promotes a desire for others to be free from suffering and to help alleviate others' suffering; both states are linked to the Buddhist concept of interconnection (Hofmann et al., 2012). Meditation practice used to induce these states, Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) and Compassion Meditation (CM), differ somewhat from other practices intended to develop mindfulness and awareness in their explicit focus on the well-being of oneself and others, and they are often combined in practice (Hofmann et al., 2012, p. 4). They are appropriate here as meditative practices to develop positive emotions and psychological well-being while also reorienting one's view to the experience of others and increase empathy, compassion and self-compassion, which are explicit goals for this Program.

With LKM, participants silently repeat successive phrases of warmth and kindness first toward oneself, then to all other beings, including those who may cause one to experience difficulty or unpleasant emotions, while CM includes a focus on alleviating others' distress (Oyler et al., 2022). Both practices have been incorporated into MBIs and widely studied in nonclinical populations demonstrating positive outcomes. Note, however, that these practices should be developed after initial training in awareness mindfulness meditation as a foundation.

Hofmann et al.'s (2012) comprehensive review of the literature found that both LKM and CM were effective in achieving positive psychological well-being (including reduced stress, anxiety, and depression) in trainings as short as short as seven minutes, which makes them

accessible and feasible for less experienced practitioners and appropriate for a time-limited intervention such as this proposed Program and for daily home practice to reinforce training sessions. The authors further noted that LKM contributed to self-acceptance as well as feelings of joy, gratitude, hope, contentment, and awe. Finally, Oyler et al. (2022) found that LKM was effective in reducing bias, which directly relates to effective, equitable philanthropy.

Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT)

ACT was derived from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, a clinical intervention intended to create greater psychological flexibility, which has been proven effective in improving affective symptoms and social functioning (Keng et al., 2011). ACT practices may be accessible to a wider range of participants as it is a mindfulness training that need not include formal meditation practice, teaching skills that “increase an individual’s willingness to come into fuller contact with the experiences, recognize their values, and commit to behaviors that are consistent with those value” (Keng et al., 2011, p. 1048), skills highly relevant to this Program’s goals. One study cited by Oyler et al. (2022) found that an ACT intervention using discussions and exercises aimed at increasing awareness and acceptance reduced hostile sexism and other biased behaviors in sessions as short as an hour or less (p. 1122), indicating its potential to improve grantmaking practices. While I believe meditation to be an important program component for developing mindfulness and achieving other positive outcomes, I recognize that some participants may be averse to the practice or in more extreme cases, may experience adverse effects. Thus, ACT may prove an effective accommodation for such participants.

Facilitated Group Discussions and Reflective Writing

The mindfulness trainings in the core Program Components described above develop awareness and the capacity to clearly see things as they are, connect participants with their

underlying feelings and emotions, and encourage self-reflection on their conditioned attitudes and feelings. Mindfulness serves as the foundational capacity for participants to understand their field and their role in practices that may be harmful, and to begin the hard work of transforming inequity in philanthropy. To connect the mindfulness training to their day-to-day work, I suggest facilitated group discussion during each session as a means of further self-reflection and shared understanding about how they may change their practices and approach to grantmaking. Group discussion content may be further explored with individual journaling and reflexive writing assignments by participants outside of formal Program sessions.

The facilitator needs no background in philanthropy because their role is to moderate and guide rather than to instruct, ensuring that discussions stay on track, are not dominated by one or a few people, and encourage quieter participants to join the conversation. Without being prescriptive, I suggest the following prompts, one for each session, which get to the core of philanthropy's ethical challenges, although participants may wish to bring in their own topics. Some of the topics are drawn from material included on the resource list (Appendix B), which participants may revisit on their own or after Program completion. Alternatively, one could use a meaningful quote as a discussion prompt.

- Begin with reflection on your own values and how you see them operationalized in your work. Are they in alignment? Do you see divergence or conflict?
- Does your organization's mission align with your values? How do you see your organization's values operationalized in your work? Does the operation of your organization support or undermine its vision and values?
- Reflect on bias (encourage use of online tools such as implicit bias assessment) and where fear or aversion may drive practices and behavior.

- Examine your relationships with grantees: are they transactional, paternalistic, mutual, close/distant, are they satisfying? How do you think your grantees talk about you/your organization?
- How do you bring community voice into your work? What expertise do you value?
- What factors most impact your practices (including organizational goals and operating procedures, oversight by superiors and governance boards). How can you influence those factors and encourage participation from others at all levels of your organization?

I consider the group discussions as an important piece of the Program as they bring the group together in shared purpose, bringing their unique perspectives and understandings about philanthropy, which may differ from others. In addition, such dialogues help solidify the group as a cohort that may offer mutual support after program completion. Finally, “homework” and post-Program activities are important to reinforce formal training, given the relatively short intervention (number of sessions and duration of each). In addition to journaling and meditation, participants should consider creating a shared drive, social media page or other means of remaining in contact and sharing insights and information (I cannot suggest FaceBook, although it has been used successfully in other programs and trainings I have done). Because meaningful change in the field requires widespread change in practices rather than the leading example of a few individuals, the wider and stronger the foundational base of each participant cohort the better the chances of the practices impacting a wider audience.

Mindful Movement

Activities combining breath with movement, such as yoga, have been shown to improve psychological well-being, mindfulness, self-compassion, and resilience (Trent et al., 2019). As

such, I recommend that each Program session include at least ten minutes of mindful movement to complement and reinforce the skills and capacity developed through other components. A series of simple poses, whether seated or standing, matched with intentional breathing, may be taught in group sessions and employed independently by participants in home practice both during and after the Program.

Conclusion

Funds held by foundations, trusts, and other giving vehicles are by definition community resources: favorable tax treatment of charitable donations applies not only to those going to public charities, but also those made to private philanthropic entities. Therefore, funds held by private giving vehicles have been removed from public coffers. Donors must understand that they are stewards of funds for the public trust and not assume “ownership” of them. As indicated above, this understanding is not widely held in the philanthropic sector, thus indicating a need for practices which better align philanthropy with its goal of promoting the public good. Given the sheer size of the sector and its power to “do good” versus inadvertently doing harm, this is an issue of growing, critical importance.

My fervent belief in the need for change in philanthropy and my conviction that targeting an “intervention” at practitioners is a viable strategy for systemic change is informed by my own experience as foundation executive. As a smaller family foundation working locally, we have had outsized influence in terms of setting standards on transparency, building partnerships with grantees, and best practices (e.g., flexible funding, multi-year giving, minimal reporting and administrative hurdles, giving according to need versus annual budget). Our “standard operating procedures” gained notice particularly when philanthropy responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, as other funders looked to our example in adopting better practices by necessity.

As funders, we sought to redefine our relationship with our grantees not just as partners, but as related human beings united by shared experience. We prioritized “just being there,” acknowledging what our partners were going through, and we allocated additional funding to support their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Everything we did reflected what, to me, mindful philanthropy looks like: leading with compassion, reinforcing our connection, honoring their humanity by listening and responding to their needs rather than focusing on our own. Witnessing our impact despite of our smaller size and local focus and seeing the enthusiasm with which other funders were willing to try a new approach, I know that individual grantmaking professionals offer an effective intervention point for changing practices. Collectively, the dedicated professionals in the field represent a force through which philanthropy has the capacity to live up to its name and to promote the betterment of humankind.

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Appendix A

The Philanthropic Sector

Philanthropy is not uniquely an American institution, although it is more “embedded within the social psyche” in the United States, which relies on a strong nonprofit sector to deliver public services (Fitton, 2021, p. 48). Similarly, both Finchum-Mason et al. (2020) and Stewart & Faulk (2014) argued that the United States has traded lower taxes for a less substantial safety net and thus positioned private philanthropy as a vital source of funding for social services programs. More explicitly, Toepler (2018) attributed the key role of philanthropy as the government’s *de facto* partner through its support of vital public services and civic institutions, an increasingly pivotal role since the inception of and continued growth of the American welfare state (p. 1967). In recent decades, the functional partnership between government and philanthropy has become increasingly formalized through public-private ventures and substantial public funding as innovative approaches developed by philanthropy for addressing social needs may be brought to scale (Abramson et al., 2014).

Philanthropic Institutions

The nonprofit sector in the United States is comprised of both public charities, which must receive most of their funding from the public, and private entities which are funded primarily by one or more related individuals or entities. Nonprofits receive their tax-exempt status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and donations to nonprofits qualify donors for a tax deduction (Hall, 2006). While some grantmaking entities are public charities (e.g., community foundations), most philanthropic vehicles are organized as private foundations which, as private entities, receive somewhat more IRS scrutiny (Stewart & Faulk, 2014). The nonprofit classification system is complicated, however, as some private foundations are not

charitable giving vehicles, but rather service organizations supported primarily by non-public sources (Toepler, 2018). For purposes of this paper, I use the term “private foundation” to refer only to a grantmaking entity, and recipient organizations more generally as “nonprofits.”

Individuals and corporations also donate to charity – again, qualifying for a charitable deduction – but the focus of this paper is on private philanthropic entities, with one notable exception: donor-advised funds (DAFs). DAFs are organized by either a commercial entity (the largest being Fidelity Charitable) or a nonprofit, such as a community foundation. Donors contribute to a segregated fund, receiving an immediate tax deduction, and recommend gifts from that fund to nonprofits (Jones, 2001). Because donor control is informal (hence the term “donor-advised”), fiduciaries sponsoring DAFs need not follow the donor’s recommendations and have full control over how contributed funds are disbursed. As such, DAFs qualify as public charities. However, as Jones (2001) emphasized, fiduciaries typically do honor donors’ wishes, as failure to do so would result in very few donors (p. 3) and DAFs therefore function much like private foundations and pose similar ethical concerns. For these reasons, I include DAFs when referring to “private foundations.”

Private Foundation Characteristics, Prevalence, and Influence

Philanthropy has existed for millennia, from alms giving and simple acts of kindness throughout history, but the “modern era of philanthropy” we associate with the sector today began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with formalized giving by wealthy industrialists of the Gilded Age (Hall, 2006; Reich, 2016). Since the formation of the first private charitable foundation in 1907, their number, size, and annual giving has increased steadily. Beginning in the 1990s, new wealth generation together with an intergenerational transfer of wealth from the “baby boomers” to their familial heirs contributed to a significant global increase in foundations

Toepler (2018). This growth in foundations' size and resources has been accompanied by a commensurate surge in their power and influence which enures to their founding donors and professional leaders.

Particularly in the past century, foundations' growth was encouraged by the U.S. government's interest in developing private resources to supplement federal, state, and local efforts to provide public services (Toepler, 2018), and was fueled in part by generous tax subsidies via the charitable deduction (Frumkin, 1998; Horvath & Powell, 2016). Abramson et al. (2014) noted that private foundations' greater flexibility and higher risk tolerance positioned them "early on as society's venture capital" and that private philanthropy has a rich history of innovations contributing to the public good (p. 54). Examples include Andrew Carnegie founding public libraries and the Rockefeller Foundation's work in medical research toward the eradication of disease (Horvath & Powell, 2016).

Much of the discussion about philanthropy, from giving trends and impact to ethical debates and considerations of its outsized influence on society, focuses on private foundations. Foundations are not the largest segment of charitable giving, representing just 18 percent of a total \$471.44 billion in the United States for 2020, compared to individual donors' 69 percent (Giving USA, 2021). However, data on how charitable gifts were allocated indicate that support for grantmaking organizations was the fourth largest category, at 12 percent – nearly 20 percent of individual donations – and DAFs received 10 percent. Therefore, a significant portion of charitable dollars were allocated not to programs and services that serve the public, but rather retained by donors through their entities which may not pass on that wealth for years or decades.

The tax-subsidized diversion of wealth from public charities to private entities obscures how such funds are ultimately deployed and raises concerns about "warehoused wealth"

removed from public coffers (Beets & Beets, 2019; Giridharadas, 2020; Horvath & Powell, 2016; Jones, 2001). Private foundations now hold over \$1.2 trillion in assets, with \$160 billion held in DAFs (Giving USA, 2021). Further, this wealth is concentrated: more than half is held by the largest private foundations (those with assets over \$100 million), which comprise just 0.2 percent of all private foundations in the United States. As a result, both private foundations and DAFs wield outsized influence in the sector, translating into outsized influence for the nation's wealthiest individuals who control those entities.

Professionalization in Philanthropy

As the size and institutionalization of the philanthropic sector grew, so did its professionalization: staffing was needed for the administrative, legal, accounting, and programmatic work that accompanied charitable giving. In particular, the external accountability requirements placed on private foundations by the Tax Reform Act (TRA) of 1969 demanded their increased allocation of resources to administrative support. While many voiced concerns that foundations' overhead expenses would crowd out their grantmaking, a study by Stewart & Faulk (2014) found that, to the contrary, there was a small positive association between professionalization grantmaking payout. Further, the authors suggest that professionalization contributed to the sector's legitimacy, which originated from its commitment to public services and rested upon an assumption about its good intentions (p. 632). Fitton (2021) proposed another benefit of professionalization, arguing that for those choosing a career in the field there would be an inherent code of ethics if not an explicit or formal one, as in other professions, and that they would embrace a commitment to the public good (p. 58).

Critics contend that professionalization has rendered philanthropy more impersonal, with disconnected donors relying on dispassionate analysis to assess grantmaking priorities and

strategies (Ylvisaker, 1982), which likely impedes philanthropy's effectiveness. Stewart & Faulk (2014) likewise found that professionalization has shifted the sector from its volunteer and community-based roots to an institutionalized model, and they questioned the net impact on efficacy relative to its benefits. More relevant to the topic of this paper, however, professionalization offers an intervention point for mindfulness to promote systemic change in philanthropy.

Appendix B

Additional Resources

Mindfulness

Center for Contemplative Mind in Society – a global community of contemplative practitioners whose mission is to “transform society positively and progressively through diverse contemplative practices,” its website offers tools, publications, training, and other resources.

<https://www.contemplativemind.org/>

Dharma Seed – online resource which “gathers, preserves, and freely shares recordings of teachers inspired by early Buddhism for the benefit of students, teachers, and dharma centers worldwide” which are largely, although not exclusively, from the Western Insight Meditation tradition. Search for talks and meditations by topic.

<https://dharmaseed.org/>

Mind & Life Institute – brings “science and contemplative wisdom together to better understand the mind and create positive change in the world,” including trainings, events and conferences; its website offers educational materials, publications, videos, and recordings.

<https://www.mindandlife.org/>

Mindfulness and Its Benefits

<https://positivepsychology.com/benefits-of-mindfulness/>

Mindful.org – Dedicated resource center, including educational materials and trainings

<https://www.mindful.org/>

Five Steps to Mindfulness, by Thich Nhat Hanh

<https://www.mindful.org/five-steps-to-mindfulness/>

Four Quick Mindfulness Techniques

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/for-thanksgiving-week-4-quick-mindfulness-techniques#1>

The History and Origins of Mindfulness

<https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/>

The Neuroscience of Mindfulness

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-brain-research-neuroscience/>

Mindfulness Exercises

Breath Awareness

<https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/Breath-Awareness.pdf>

Noticing Five Things

<https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/The-Five-Senses-Worksheet.pdf> Five Things

Mayo Clinic – Practicing Mindfulness

<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-mindfulness-practicing-mindfulness-exercises/>

21 Mindfulness Activities for Adults

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>

Mindfulness Trainings & Certifications

Mindfulness X – a complete, 8 session mindfulness training template for professionals.

<https://pro.positivepsychology.com/product/mindfulness-x-complete-8-week-mindfulness-training-template/>

Centre for Mindfulness Studies Toronto – offers several different types of courses in mindfulness, from introductory classes to mindfulness training aimed at organizations.

<https://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/>

Mindful Schools – offers a 6-week online program and includes lifetime access to the course materials which include Mindfulness of Breath, Mindfulness of Body, Mindfulness of Emotions, Development of the Heart, Interpersonal Mindfulness and Everyday Mindfulness.

<https://www.mindfulschools.org/>

Be Mindful Online – an online mindfulness course that can be completed in 4 weeks or more, including videos and interactive exercises, 12 assignments, five guided meditation downloads, online tools, and resources emailed upon course completion.

<https://www.bemindfulonline.com/>

Future Learn – a free, online mindfulness course completed over a period of 6 weeks; explores the science behind mindfulness as well as mindfulness exercises one can apply to their own life.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/subjects/psychology-and-mental-health-courses/mindfulness-wellbeing>

The Mindfulness Awareness Research Center, University of California at Los Angeles – offers several different mindfulness training options, both in-person and online, including a heavy focus on meditation so that students can apply mindfulness practices to daily life.

<https://www.uclahealth.org/programs/marc>

Harvard University, Center for Wellness – in addition to full MBSR trainings, the Center for Wellness offers a quarterly meditation series as well as other mindfulness trainings.

<https://wellness.huhs.harvard.edu/>

The Now Project – offers an introductory class called The Miracle of Mindfulness, which consists of 6 weekly 1½ hour sessions.

<https://lovelifelivenow.com/mindfulness-course-london/>

The Center for Mindful Self-Compassion – offers workshops in-person and online, teaching the core skills of mindful self-compassion.

<https://centerformsc.org/>

Mind & Life Institute – in-person and online trainings for mindfulness, including its intersections with other fields.

<https://www.mindandlife.org/>

Philanthropy

Amplifier Giving – an experiential learning lab for collaborative and democratized giving, rooted in Jewish values intended to empower people to give more intentionally, more meaningfully, and in community

<https://www.amplifiorgiving.org/>

CHANGE Philanthropy – a coalition of philanthropic networks that is working to integrate diversity, inclusion, and social justice into philanthropic practice

<https://changephilanthropy.org/>

EDGE Philanthropy – an applied research and consulting firm that exists to enhance philanthropic practice and accelerate impact, its website offers a comprehensive selection of research, publications, resources for grantmakers

<https://edgephilanthropy.com/resources/>

PEAK Grantmaking – a member-led community of philanthropy professionals dedicated to advancing equitable, effective grantmaking practices, its website offers a comprehensive selection of research, publications and resources for best practices in grantmaking

<https://www.peakgrantmaking.org/>

Resonance: A Framework for Philanthropic Transformation – a guide to support philanthropic organizations' transition to reducing extractive practices and increasing regenerative practices

<https://justicefunders.org/resonance/>

Thousand Currents Academy – offers training in philanthropy focused on justice and equity

<https://thousandcurrents.org/the-academy/>

The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project – a peer-to-peer funder initiative to address the inherent power imbalances between foundations and nonprofits committed to trust-based philanthropy, which is rooted in a set of values that help advance equity, shift power, and build mutually accountable relationships

<https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/>