

# Using Developmental Evaluation to Address Uncertainty from a Systems Perspective

Nora F. Murphy, TerraLuna Collaborative

Jean A. King, University of Minnesota

# How three developmental evaluations addressed issues of uncertainty



# Brief situation analyses

- What the program was about
- Key actors
- Contextual factors
  - Supporting the evaluation process
  - Constraining the evaluation process



# Addressing uncertainty

Uncertainty exists in:

- The projects generally
- Specific situations that arise in the projects
- The extent to which DE can actually happen

Once you know you need to do something. . .

## **SEVEN WAYS TO RESPOND TO UNCERTAINTY**

# 1. Expect uncertainty



## The Mountain of Accountability



Blandin Foundation™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

### Mission Fulfillment

#### Accountability for Learning, Development and Adaptation

- Deep reflective practice
- Developmental evaluation
- Strategic framework evaluation
- Focus on systems change, innovation & complexity

#### Accountability for Impact and Effectiveness

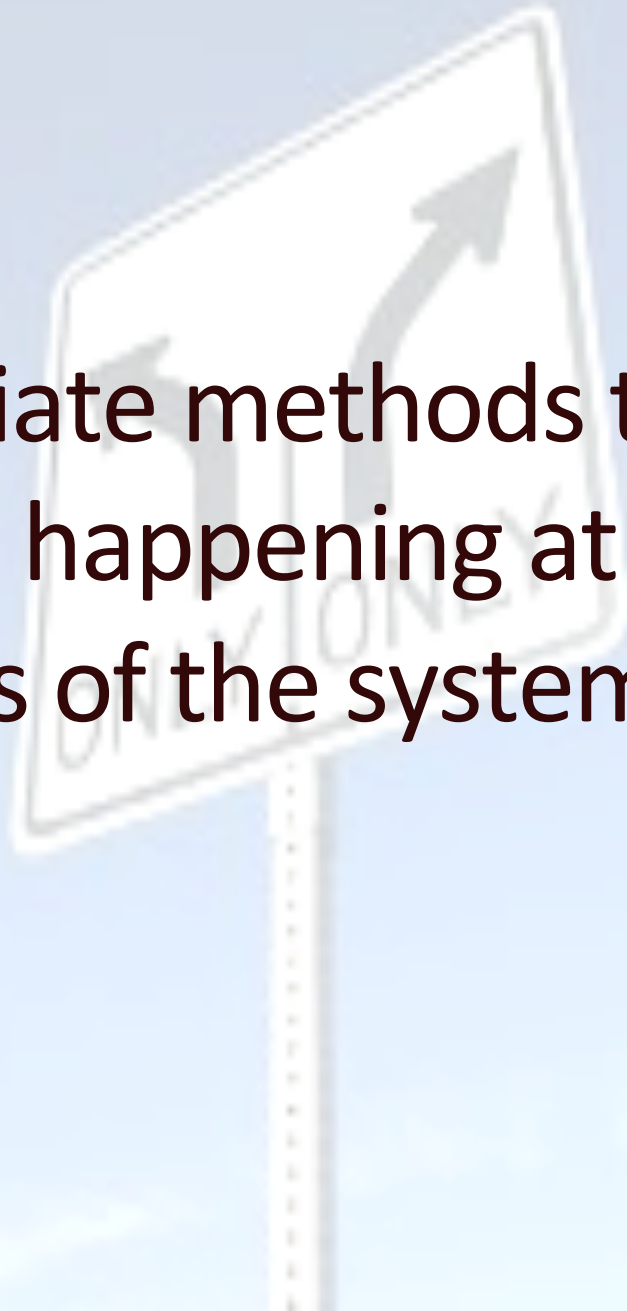
- Major program evaluations
- External strategic evaluation
- Board survey & feedback
- Grantee Perception Report
- Synthesis of grantees' reports
- Employee surveys

#### Basic Accountability for Management Processes

- Financial audits & investment returns
- Personnel evaluation
- Basic management information system
- Due diligence
- Routine grantee reporting
- Community indicators for planning

Reflect on where  
uncertainty exists  
and how you  
might respond

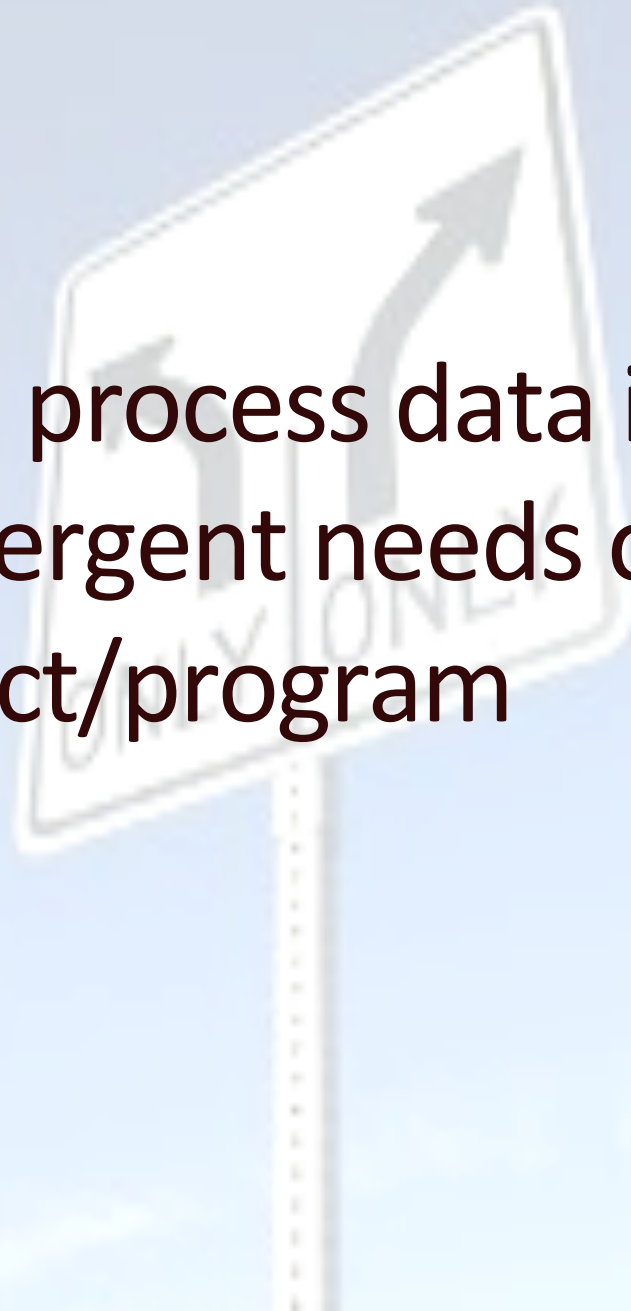
2. Use appropriate methods to  
“see” what is happening at  
different levels of the system



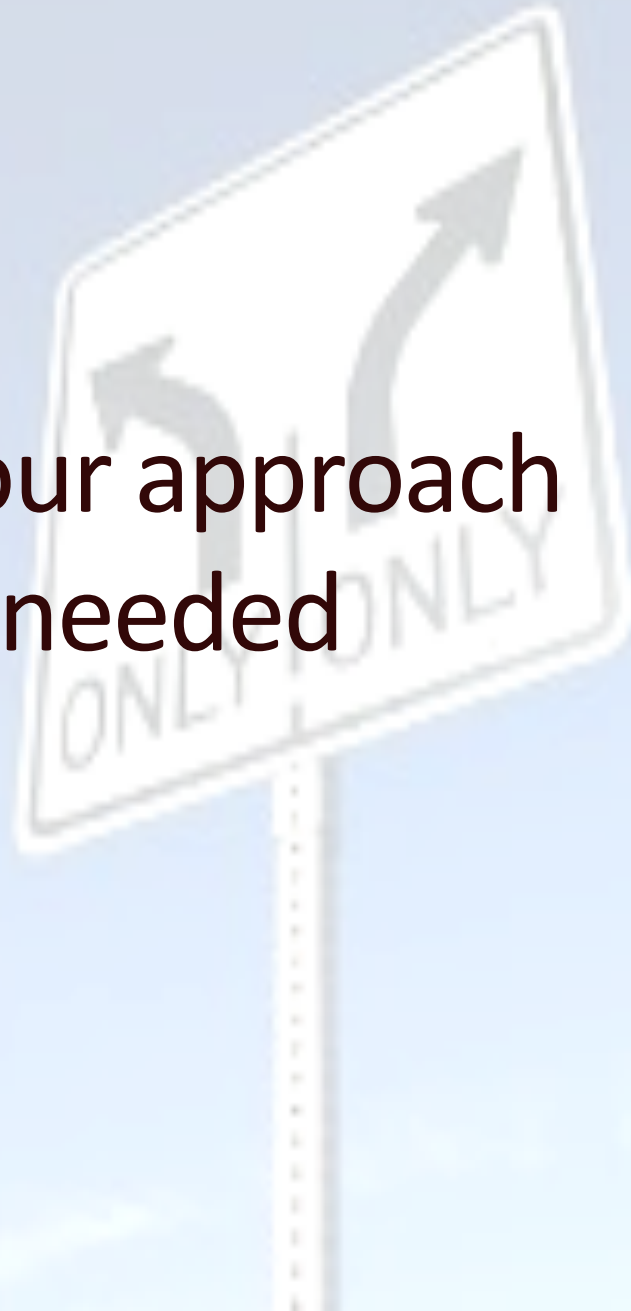
### 3. Look for inter-relationships



4. Collect and process data in sync with emergent needs of the project/program



## 5. Adapt your approach when needed



## **Intended Strategy**

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graph LR; A[Intended Strategy] --- B[Unrealized Strategy]; A --- C[Deliberate Strategy]; C --- D[Realized Strategy]; E[Emergent Strategy] --- D
```

### **Unrealized Strategy**

Things you thought you would do that you ended up leaving behind for one reason or another

### **Deliberate Strategy**

Things you planned to do that are working and you'll continue doing / intended strategies that were implemented

### **Emergent Strategy**

New opportunities you noticed along the way and that you are incorporating as part of the work

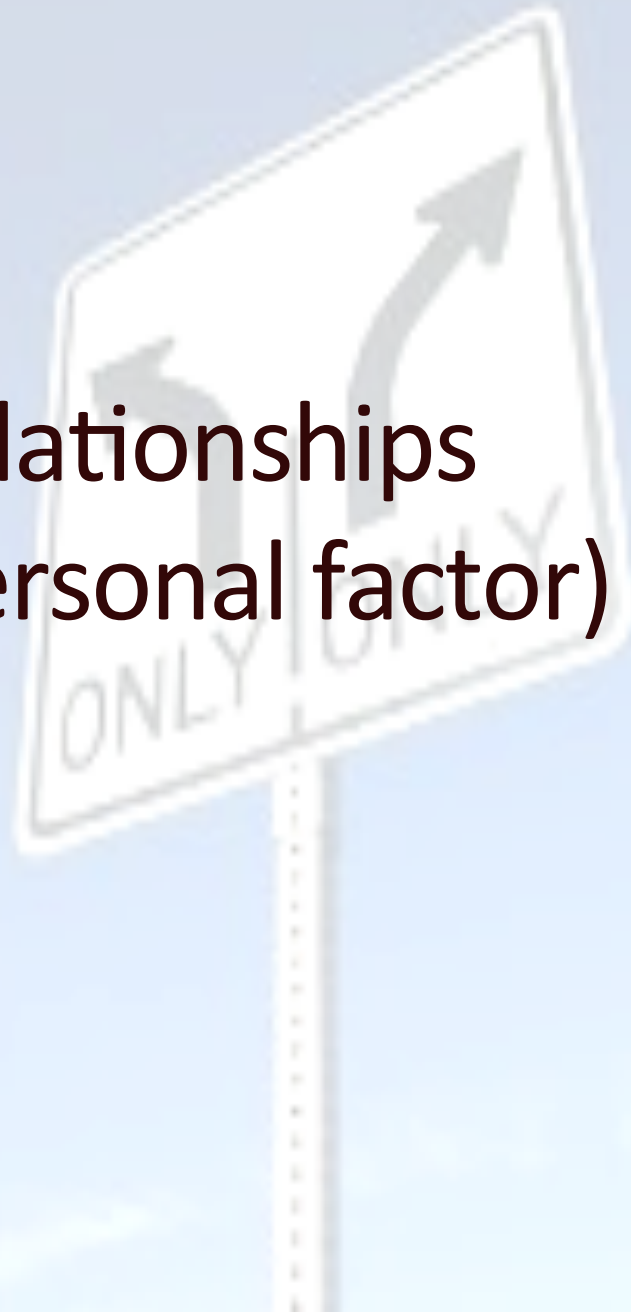
### **Realized Strategy**

This then becomes your new baseline—your Intended Strategy—for the next conversation

## 6. Engage people in the sense-making



## 7. Build relationships (the interpersonal factor)



# Thoughts on DE and uncertainty

- DE requires clients who understand complexity and who are willing to engage in active reflection
- There are sometimes opportunities to use formative/summative evaluation within development evaluation
- Developing and using principles allow you to work in gray areas

# Questions raised

- How are DE and ECB related?
- How do you know if developmental evaluation is the right fit?