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## **Mentor North Request for Proposal (RFP) Strategic Planning Consultant**

**Proposal Deadline:** January 31, 2025  
**Tentative Project Start:** March/April, 2025

### **Organization Overview**

Based in Duluth, MN, and serving the greater Twin Ports of Duluth and Superior, WI, Mentor North's mission is to celebrate youth and support their families through one-on-one mentorship and community engagement. We believe in the dignity of all people, affirm youth and families' individual stories and welcome participants from a variety of identities and backgrounds. Our goal is to create a vibrant and inclusive mentorship community.

Established as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2019, Mentor North emerged from a longstanding collaborative across seven Duluth-based youth-serving agencies. Our core programs, Mentor Duluth and Mentor Superior, match youth ages 7 to 17 with carefully screened and trained adult mentors based on interests, personality, values, identities, lived experiences, and goals, for safe, structured mentoring relationships. Through regular activities and consistent support, mentors help youth build confidence, develop social skills, improve wellness, and explore new interests—just as youth help mentors grow in return. Mentors and mentees commit to meeting four to six hours a month for at least one year. Our participants come from diverse backgrounds, with about 30% having a disclosed disability, nearly half being youth of color and 70 to 80% from low-income households.

To help facilitate community engagement, Mentor North works with multiple community partners to reduce costs for a wide variety of activities, ensuring access to experiences aligned with each youth and mentor's unique interests and goals. Our program advocates provide ongoing wrap-around support to youth (including those who are waiting for a mentor), mentors, and families, offering resources and referrals to help them navigate challenges and celebrate successes. Mentor North's one-on-one model allows tailored interactions to each participant and their situation, prioritizing youth voice and goals to support their development and well-being.

Over the last 1-2 years, Mentor North has experienced growth in client number, depth of service, staff size, and funding. Our annual budget is approximately \$400,000. Currently, we have 4 full-time employees, 4 part-time employees, a full-time AmeriCorps VISTA

member and a part-time paid intern. We also have a 12-15-member Board of Directors. We are primarily funded through local and regional grant funding and business contributions, combined with event revenue and individual donations (which we have been working to increase). Our organization is at a pivotal point where we must identify how to grow to best serve the community, retain/increase staff, communicate our services and impact, and generate revenue to remain sustainable. We are looking to more clearly define and prioritize our goals, and possible paths to reach them.

### **Recent Organizational Changes and Initiatives**

- July 2021 - New Executive Director, Beth Burt
- May 2022 and July 2022 - Retirement of 5 Points Academic Mentoring Program and Mutual Mentoring Programs, respectively, to refocus on core community-based mentoring programs, Mentor Duluth and Mentor Superior
- May 2022 - Departure of ED Beth Burt
- July 2022 - New Executive Director, Jill Hinnners
- November 2023 - Resilience Builders Monthly Giving Program introduced
- November 2023 - Superior Subcommittee merger with Mentor North Outreach Committee
- November 2024 - 30% higher program enrollment than Nov. 2023

### **Purpose of the Strategic Plan**

We are seeking an experienced consultant to lead Mentor North in developing a comprehensive (tent. 3-year) strategic plan. Our organization currently lacks a formal plan, and we believe that establishing one will provide guidance for the board, executive director, and staff as we work toward expanding our impact, improving internal policies, incorporating youth voice, and responding to both internal and external trends, challenges, needs and changes.

### **Objectives**

We would like the strategic plan to help us achieve the following key outcomes:

- **Provide clear direction and tangible goals** for both the board and the executive director.
- **Shape and adapt organizational policies** to meet current and future needs.
- **Align board priorities with budget creation and approval processes**, using the strategic plan as a reference for decision-making.
- **Guide strategies** for board recruitment, staff retention, funding sustainability, and DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) commitments.
- **Unify the board, staff and other key stakeholders** around high-level organizational goals, values, and vision, clarifying where we should devote the most energy.

- **Increase organizational stability**, while identifying opportunities and strategies for **sustainable growth** to improve our response to community needs related to mentorship.

### **Desired Planning Process**

We are looking for a process that:

- Engages Mentor North board members, staff and program participants.
- Begins with a **SWOT analysis** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), incorporating stakeholder interviews and feedback.
- Incorporates **youth voice** and perspectives.
- Helps ensure our relevance to the needs of youth, families and the Twin Ports community at large..
- Results in a **vision statement** to complement our existing mission statement, and a **theory of change** to complement our current logic model.
- Revisits and refines our agency's **values**, ensuring they are current and reflective of our mission.
- Creates a **screening tool** that will help the board and staff make decisions, ensuring opportunities align with our mission, vision and values.
- Defines **infrastructure and resources** needed to achieve goals
- Culminates in an effective, realistic **strategic plan**, including a timetable of implementation with specific measurable benchmarks, objectives, activities and outcomes.

### **Facilitator Qualifications**

Mentor North sees and recognizes the systematic oppressions that negatively impact people of color, women, people from working class backgrounds, LGBTQIA2S+, and people with disabilities. Because we believe that these communities must be centered in the work that we do, we welcome and highly encourage proposals from Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC), LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, and people with disabilities.

We are looking for a facilitator with the following qualities and experience:

- Expertise in strategic planning for **small nonprofits**.
- Experience with **youth mentoring** or **youth development**, preferably within the context of our local community.
- Strong understanding of **DEIB principles** and proven success integrating them into strategic planning processes.
- The ability to create a **brave and safe space** for difficult conversations.
- The ability to ensure **equal contribution from all participants** while keeping the process on track and focused.
- The insight and ability to offer **fresh ideas** while understanding our unique context and needs.

### **Timeline and Deliverables**

We hope to begin this project in March 2025 and anticipate the process will take approximately four months, but we are open to recommendations for a different timeline to include stakeholder engagement, planning sessions, and the final delivery of the strategic plan.

### **Proposal Requirements**

Please include the following in your response:

1. A brief overview of your experience and qualifications relevant to this project.
2. Your approach to the strategic planning process, including methodologies and engagement strategies.
3. A proposed timeline for completing the project.
4. A detailed fee structure, including any travel or other expenses.
5. Two to three references from previous clients, ideally in the nonprofit sector or youth development space.

### **Review Process**

Proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by the Executive Director who will recommend finalists for consideration by the Board Strategic Planning Task Force. Criteria for evaluation will include:

- Demonstrated knowledge, skills, and experience in conducting strategic planning projects in nonprofit organizations.
- Understanding of youth development and/or mentoring fields.
- Ability to meet deadlines and operate within budget—not to exceed \$12,000.
  - **We welcome proposals that scale the project as needed to remain within our budget**
- Satisfactory performance record.

### **Submission Instructions and Deadline**

Please submit your complete proposal via email by January 31, 2025, to Jill Hinnens, Executive Director: [Jill@MentorNorth.org](mailto:Jill@MentorNorth.org)

### **Questions**

For questions, clarification or additional information, please contact Jill Hinnens, Executive Director: [Jill@MentorNorth.org](mailto:Jill@MentorNorth.org), 218-606-2772.

We look forward to reviewing your proposal and working together to shape the future of Mentor North!