



MENTOR
NEBRASKA

THE STATE OF MENTORING IN NEBRASKA 2021



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INTRODUCTION

3-4

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

5-7

MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERS

8-10

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

12-16

MAPPING PROJECT SUMMARY

18-22

FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW SUMMARY

24-31

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

32



INTRODUCTION



MENTOR NEBRASKA

MENTOR Nebraska has been the unifying champion of quality youth mentoring for more than 20 years. We lead Nebraska's mentoring movement by serving as a critical link between MENTOR National efforts and our state's local mentoring organizations. Our work is research-based with the ultimate vision to close the mentoring gap and drive equity through quality mentoring relationships for young people. This is accomplished through evidence-based training, consulting, advocacy, and mentor recruitment.

With the intention of serving as the catalyst and leader for quality mentoring in Nebraska, **MENTOR Nebraska is uniquely positioned to work with youth-serving programs, schools, nonprofits, government organizations, and companies to increase their capacity and effectiveness.** We are intent on making progress towards closing the mentoring gap and ensuring that all mentoring relationships in Nebraska are safe and effective.

The need for our work is clear. Mentoring, at its core, guarantees to young people that there is someone who cares about them, assures them they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges, and affirms that they matter. Research of programs with strong youth outcomes has shown that the consistent use of quality standards and training for youth-serving professionals and mentors is key to delivering the high-quality programs that all young people need and deserve.



MENTOR NATIONAL

MENTOR is the unifying champion for expanding the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships across the United States. **Thirty years ago, MENTOR was created to expand opportunities for young people by building a youth mentoring field and movement.** The result: a more than 10-fold increase in young people in structured mentoring relationships. Today, MENTOR is the expert voice representing a movement that meets young people everywhere they are - from schools, to workplaces, and beyond. MENTOR operates in collaboration with MENTOR Nebraska and 23 other state Affiliates across the country. As One MENTOR, we bring together our unique strengths and talents to advance a shared vision of quality mentoring for young people.



EQUIVOLVE CONSULTING

Equivolve is a Black-owned social sector strategy firm focused on equity and driven by a belief in the abundant potential that exists around the world. It sees equity as the means by which we achieve a just society where the gap between human potential and resources and opportunities no longer exists and where people have what they need to be their best selves. Its work is in service of closing this gap. Equivolve uses innovative research, evaluation, and strategy approaches to help leaders and organizations drive equitable results.



OUR MISSION

To fuel the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships, strengthen collaboration, and advocate for mentoring.

OUR VISION

For every young person to have the supportive relationships they need to grow and develop into thriving, productive, and engaged adults.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MENTOR Nebraska would like to acknowledge and thank the mentoring program leaders, young people, board members, and stakeholders who participated in our mapping project and strategic planning process. Your feedback, insight, and passion were critical to the vision and foundation of this report.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank our funders for their continued support throughout the years. Our work to increase the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships across Nebraska would not be possible without their investment and trust. We are grateful they believe in our innovative mentoring approaches and commitment to drive equity through quality mentoring relationships for young people. A special thank you to ServeNebraska for providing us with an AmeriCorps planning grant that made this report possible.

We thank the leadership of the MENTOR Nebraska Board, past and present, for the vision to feature mentoring as a chief strategy for youth achievement.

We would be hugely remiss if we did not also thank and acknowledge MENTOR National, Maryland MENTOR, Equivolve Consulting, and Mike Garringer for providing their guidance and expertise throughout this process.

Lastly, we acknowledge and thank you, the reader, for picking up this report and, hopefully, learning something from it that will spur you to do something to support a young person – today!



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The planning process of this report was designed to be inclusive and engage the range of stakeholders that interact with and are impacted by MENTOR Nebraska, including sectors that work closely with mentoring programs, such as education and juvenile justice, as well as a range of mentoring program providers, young adults engaged in mentoring, funders, board members, and staff. MENTOR Nebraska approached the planning process with considerable thought, intention, and input so that our path forward is both responsive and proactive. We would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their input.

MENTORING PROGRAMS

100 Black Men of Omaha*

ACE Mentor Omaha*

ANDY Foundation

Asian Community & Cultural Center

Athlete2Athlete

Atlas: Lincoln

Banisters Leadership Academy

Big Brothers Big Sisters Lincoln*

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Nebraska*

Big Brothers Big Sisters of The Midlands*

Big Pals-Little Pals of Greater Columbus*

Blue Valley Community Action Partnership

Boys & Girls Club of Lincoln/Lancaster County

CASA for Lancaster County

Catholic Charities

City Impact

Community Action Health Center

Community Connections Mentoring*

FITGirl, Inc.

Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska

Girls Inc of Omaha - Pathfinders Mentoring*

Greater Omaha Chamber

Greater Omaha Youth for Christ

Guide Right Omaha. Inc.

International Council for Refugees & Immigrants

Joslyn Art Museum

Kids Can Community Center*

Latino Center of the Midlands

MAYS Foundation

Mentoring Plus

MentoringWorks

Nebraska Department of Correctional Services

Nebraska Extension, Douglas-Sarpy Counties

Norfolk Family Coalition

Ollie Webb Center, Inc.*

Omaha Girls Rock

Omaha Street School

Omaha Young Life

Partnership 4 Hope Inc.

Partnership 4 Kids*

Project Everlast- Nebraska Children

Ralston Public Schools

Release Inc.*

Saint Francis Ministries

SAVE Program

Sidney High School Mentoring

Society of American Military Engineers

SPARKPositivity

T.R.A.C.life Mentoring

TeamMates Mentoring

The Bay (Rabble Mill)

The Bike Union Mentoring Project*

The Friends Program

The Zone Afterschool Program, Inc.

UNO Juvenile Justice Institute

YMCA Of Lincoln - Northeast

You Go Girl

Youth Emergency Services*

Youth for Greater Good

YWCA Lincoln

***MENTOR Nebraska Partner Member**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Grand Island Public Schools
Millard Public Schools
Ralston Public Schools

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Douglas County Board of Commissioners
Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center
Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility
Peter Kiewit Foundation

YOUNG PEOPLE

Michaela

Omaha, NE

Zach

Grand Island, NE

MENTOR NEBRASKA BOARD

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Juan Padilla, Canopy South

Carol Russell, Community Volunteer

Betsy Vidlak, Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska

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AmeriCorps
Nebraska

*The 2021 Mapping Project
was made possible through
an AmeriCorps planning
grant from ServeNebraska.*



MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



When I joined the MENTOR Nebraska team in August of 2019, I don't think that I could have predicted the space and position we are in today. Six months after joining the organization, we were challenged like every other human being, organization, and sector in navigating a global pandemic. This coupled with racial injustices exposed in communities across the U.S. amplified the importance and the critical need for mentoring. It became evident that if we were going to do right by the young people who center the work we do, that we owed it to them to truly understand and celebrate our mentoring sector's successes but also uncover and lift up areas for improvement. Make no mistake, this also includes the role that MENTOR Nebraska plays in supporting our state's mentoring sector and the ways that we need to show up differently and more intentionally.

In April 2020, we embarked on the first phase of understanding the current state of mentoring in Nebraska. It had been several years since we had catalogued and mapped where mentoring is happening, in what physical spaces, the young people served, and the focus and structure of these programmatic efforts. The goal of this initial phase was to be inclusive of the ways that we see mentoring benefiting young people. While many of the relationships we champion in Nebraska's mentoring movement take place in programmatic contexts led by youth-serving organizations, the reality is that mentoring relationships also come about more organically through family, faith, and community connections in schools, out-of-school time programs, sports and recreation leagues, clubs,

youth groups, churches and other spaces of worship, and even summer camps. This was no easy undertaking, but we leaned on past and current connections, coalitions, school districts, (and even Google searches) to invite as many folks as we could to participate in the mapping phase through an online survey. We know that we may have not reached everyone, but we sure tried! The physical "map" later in this report shows the remarkable breadth of mentoring happening in our state. However, it also revealed where there is limited access for some young people in our communities.

In the second phase of our outreach, we focused on building upon the connections we made through the survey and mapping process to bring folks together from a cross-section of sectors to facilitate focus groups and interviews. The recommendations, suggestions, and thoughtful insights outlined in this report represent the desire to elevate mentoring at all levels of impact – as individuals, programs, and the collective sector. We know our role as Nebraska's affiliate of MENTOR is a part of this mentoring ecosystem. The process in developing this report is our way in honoring the work that has been done and the work that lies ahead of us. Without a doubt, there is truly remarkable, innovative, and intentional work happening in our state's mentoring sector.

We hope that you find this report valuable and as a point of reflection for how you might do more to directly support a young person in your community or use your influence and gifts to uplift the mentoring field as a whole. We look forward to our collaborative work ahead.



Melissa Mayo

MELISSA MAYO

Executive Director
MENTOR Nebraska



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD



As the Chair of MENTOR Nebraska's Board of Directors, I am proud and appreciative of our team as we continue to push boundaries and bring innovation to the mentoring sector. I have seen firsthand how our work has helped improve program quality and capacity, and ultimately connect more young people in Nebraska with mentoring. But we know there is more work to be done.

The success of MENTOR Nebraska starts with relationships -listening, building trust, and responding to the needs of young people and the dedicated staff and volunteers of mentoring programs closest to the work. This report captures what we learned from stakeholders and how we can work together to ensure every young person has access to the caring relationships they need to thrive. The MENTOR Nebraska team and Board are committed to bringing the ideas, suggestions, and recommendations outlined in this

report to fruition. We understand that this means being more present and collaborative in all regions of our state. It also means honoring the work that is already happening and building on the strengths and resources of communities to uplift opportunities so that mentoring is accessible for all the amazing young people in Nebraska.

We hope you find this report enlightening but also take a moment to reflect on your own involvement in the mentoring movement ---How can you mentor a young person in your sphere? What can you do to support the mentoring field at large? How can we work together to strengthen Nebraska's future generation? With a little effort from everyone, we can move mountains.



MATTHEW E. ENENBACH

Board Chair
MENTOR Nebraska



MESSAGE FROM MENTOR NATIONAL



As we reflect on MENTOR Nebraska's servant leadership in supporting mentoring programs and young people especially through these unprecedented times, two words come to mind: responsive and innovative. In recent years, MENTOR Nebraska's leadership has been characterized in their responsive and innovative approach on everything from expanding to a statewide service area, to providing mentor screening funding, to the customized training and support services provided for the many stakeholders already in and joining the youth mentoring movement in the state.

They have built upon existing valued services such as the local delivery of the Quality Mentoring System, the National Mentoring Resource Center, and provision of technological infrastructure for mentoring programs to provide new solutions relative to conditions created by the pandemic. Other recent examples of MENTOR Nebraska's leadership is in the areas of cross-sector partnership and equity. Whether in helping districts leverage relationships to drive attendance or in helping the child welfare system improve youth outcomes, they have ushered in innovative mentoring approaches in Nebraska. These innovations span from Youth Initiated Mentoring to STRIVE Mentoring to Success Mentors.

As a leader nationally and key member of MENTOR's national network, MENTOR Nebraska is able to mine the best of research, practice, cross-sector partnerships to ensure the state is prioritizing and delivering on relationships through the structures and strategies that are most effective. They have also helped the field sharpen its lens on the too frequently under-resourced and less heard youth populations in the state - young people involved in the juvenile justice system, high school refugee students, and students with chronic absences. By focusing on these populations and bringing new ways of thinking and models to the systems and organizations that seek to better support them, MENTOR Nebraska breathes life into the words of MENTOR National's co-founder legendary athlete and human rights leader Bill Russell, "There is no such thing as other people's children."

And as we reflect on the past year, we can say once again that the pandemic reinforced our understanding of the need for purpose, belonging, and connection. It can be understood through the voices of young people, through the lens of both struggles and opportunities. Perhaps one of the most remarkable opportunities - one that arose out of necessity - is our ability to meaningfully connect and grow relationships remotely. By meeting with mentors across time zones, our young people were able to gain perspectives and a unique awareness that "we're all in this together" - a perspective that otherwise might not have happened. MENTOR Nebraska was on the ground providing

virtual solutions for programs, keeping the field connected so folks would not be alone in their challenges and could crowdsource solutions, and elevating voices most affected and most effective for guiding us through disruption and trauma and toward awakening, healing, connection, and thriving.

Similarly, this year, the MENTOR community (MENTOR National and Affiliates) laid the groundwork for One MENTOR - rooted in the belief that the MENTOR community is all in together, freely sharing our unique strengths and talents to advance a shared vision of delivering quality mentoring for all our young people.

By embracing One MENTOR, we are opening the door for even greater growth for each Affiliate, for MENTOR's national footprint, and for the mentoring movement. Shared knowledge, tools, skills, and funding will only serve to strengthen our strategies and tactics as we build our organizations, our partnerships, and our future leaders. So, as MENTOR Nebraska continues to move forward, it will advance as part of a strong network that lifts up individual Affiliates' strengths and supports individual Affiliates' through the challenges inherent in growth as we work together for our movement and for our young people. And the network in turn will learn from MENTOR Nebraska's experience in driving supportive relationships as not only a driver of healthy development and optimal outcomes but also a necessity we must ensure all young people have in their lives.

Response and innovation begin with listening and understanding. MENTOR Nebraska is a trailblazer in finding out what mentoring programs and partners in other sectors need and want to better serve young people and achieve optimal outcomes. By implementing this comprehensive annual survey and communicating its findings, MENTOR Nebraska is able to use current data and real-life examples to identify the gaps that exist in services, as well as amplify the impact that mentoring has on the health and wellbeing of the state's young people, and guide toward collective solutions. It serves as yet another way we all learn from them and are honored to have their leadership, partnership, and example in the MENTOR network of backbone leaders in the movement.

With Gratitude,



DAVID SHAPIRO

Chief Executive Officer
MENTOR National



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the course of 2021, MENTOR Nebraska embarked on a three-phase planning process to better understand the state of mentoring in Nebraska. This process involved extensive data collection and review, including a statewide mapping project, focus groups, and interviews with stakeholders. The findings from these efforts will be used to help shape the vision for our future work and design a new strategic plan.

PHASE 1

MAPPING PROJECT

During the summer of 2021, MENTOR Nebraska surveyed 60 organizations across the state for the 2021 MENTOR Nebraska Mapping Project. This report provides a snapshot of mentoring in Nebraska's communities and reflects a key piece of this planning effort. Through a strengths-based questionnaire and analysis of community and school district data, the project estimates the size and scope of the mentoring sector - detailing geographic location and service coverage, programming design and objectives, target audiences, community conditions and areas for future growth. In doing so, the report identifies opportunities for MENTOR Nebraska to guide programs toward areas with high need and limited opportunity, advance both awareness and implementation of the *Effective Elements of Practice*, elevate mentor recruitment to represent participant communities, and support outreach to unique populations.

PHASE 2

FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

In the second phase of this effort, MENTOR Nebraska partnered with Equivolve to gather insight from stakeholders on strengths, emerging opportunities, and other information about the state's mentoring landscape. During the fall of 2021, Equivolve facilitated 4 focus groups and 6 interviews with funders, board members, partners in the education and juvenile justice sectors, member partners, nonmember organizations, and young adults.

PHASE 3

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Many important learnings emerged from the stakeholders who engaged in the planning process which helped deepen MENTOR Nebraska's understanding of the mentoring landscape. These learnings, in turn, will inform our new strategic goals from 2022-2025 around programming, policy & advocacy, youth voice, and statewide expansion to connect more young people with high-quality mentoring.





CALL TO ACTION

Based on the findings from the mapping project, focus groups, interviews, and strategic planning, the following recommendations were formulated. They are intended to provide stakeholders with ideas on how to support mentoring programs across Nebraska in meaningful and responsive ways with the intent to improve quality mentoring practices for youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS



BECOME A MENTOR

Your professional and personal life experiences could help enrich the life of a young person and provide them with insight and support during important life transitions. Find a mentoring opportunity near you at www.MENTORNebraska.org.



ADVOCATE FOR MENTORING

Raise your voice, share your knowledge, and affect positive change by asking your representatives, community leaders, and schools to prioritize mentoring relationships for young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY



INVEST IN QUALITY MENTORING

Support the development of a strong mentoring ecosystem by funding MENTOR Nebraska and offering direct support to mentoring programs. Use MENTOR Nebraska's reports and resources to inform your investments.



ENCOURAGE GRANTEES TO PARTICIPATE IN BEST PRACTICE ASSESSMENTS

The National Quality Mentoring System (NQMS) facilitated by MENTOR Nebraska provides a structured, systematic process for assessing the quality of a mentoring program's practices in alignment with the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTORING PROGRAMS



ATTEND MENTOR NEBRASKA'S NO-COST TRAININGS

MENTOR Nebraska offers no-cost trainings each month to help mentoring and youth-serving professionals gain the support and resources they need to provide high quality mentoring experiences.



UTILIZE MENTOR NEBRASKA'S CONSULTING SERVICES

MENTOR Nebraska's team of expert trainers and consultants provide customized consulting to enhance and strengthen mentoring programs' practices.



CONNECT WITH OTHER MENTORING PROGRAMS

MENTOR Nebraska convenes mentoring leaders across Nebraska for bi-monthly meetings to discuss challenges and solutions, share resources, and better understand the needs of young people and mentors alike in their communities.



BECOME A MEMBER PARTNER

Join MENTOR Nebraska's member network and be a part of a collective effort to improve mentoring practices in our state. Members receive the highest level of benefits, including no-cost background checks for new mentors, no-cost data collection and case management system, no-cost access to statewide recruitment activities, and opportunities for funding support.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE COMMUNITY



ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF MENTORING IN YOUR WORKPLACE

Work with MENTOR Nebraska and our partner mentoring programs to recruit mentors. Provide paid time off or flex time for staff members to mentor during work hours.



INVEST IN YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH INTERNSHIPS

Partner with community-based mentoring programs to recruit youth for paid internship opportunities, and, as part of the internship, encourage staff to serve as mentors to interns. This could support opportunities for youth to obtain permanent employment in the future and learn more about the range of possible career opportunities.



INVEST IN WORKPLACE MENTORING

Make mentoring and career development a priority for your team. MENTOR Nebraska can provide custom training and consulting services based on your organization's needs to attract and retain talent.



JOIN THE CORPORATE HONOR ROLL

The National Corporate Mentoring Honor Roll recognizes outstanding corporations across the United States that support the youth mentoring field in a variety of ways. Companies receive access to mentoring research, tools and resources to support corporate mentoring initiatives, and national recognition for their commitment to mentoring, and different options to support mentoring in their communities.

“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS OTHER PEOPLE’S CHILDREN.”

Bill Russell, MENTOR Co-Founder

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM



CONNECT YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MENTORS

Work alongside MENTOR Nebraska to connect young people involved in the juvenile justice system with mentors through Youth Initiated Mentoring.



ADVOCATE

Allocate dedicated resources and funding for innovative and responsive mentoring models for young people at different levels of involvement in the juvenile justice system from prevention to intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS



INVEST IN MENTORING

Expand state and federal investment in quality, evidence-based youth mentoring to improve supports, interventions and outcomes for young people. Support mentoring policies that increase resources and access to mentoring.



COLLABORATE

Look to MENTOR Nebraska and partner member programs as resources for data, testimony, and expertise in making the case for investment in mentoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS



IMPLEMENT MENTORING IN YOUR SCHOOLS

Partner with MENTOR to implement intentional mentoring initiatives, including STRIVE Mentoring for refugee youth and Success Mentors for chronically absent youth.



BECOME A RELATIONSHIP-CENTERED SCHOOL

Bring strategies from MENTOR’s Relationship Centered Schools campaign to school districts to strengthen and scale existing or developing new school-based mentoring services, train students on building social capital and supportive networks, provide professional development for teachers and staff, and so much more.



ENGAGE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Connect students with school and community-based mentoring programs for additional support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTOR NEBRASKA

ADVANCE BEST PRACTICES ACROSS THE STATE THROUGH NO-COST TRAINING AND CONSULTING

- Continue to offer and develop new trainings and resources related to race, diversity, gender identity, disability, trauma-informed care, evidence-based practices, etc.
- Provide program evaluation support to programs. Consider the burden of data collection requirements placed on mentoring organizations, particularly those that are small and underfunded, and instead help increase programs' capacity to collect and submit data.



CHAMPION MENTORING

- Normalize mentoring for everyone. Support non-traditional mentoring models, promote youth-initiated mentoring models for the right environments, and advocate for these models for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Communicate MENTOR's impact and value added to the mentoring field in Nebraska.
- Work with organizations to better communicate the benefits of being a mentor, what is needed to become a mentor, and the value of an organization that has met mentoring quality standards.
- Elevate BIPOC mentor recruitment.



ADVOCATE FOR MENTORING

- Push for policies that support quality and expanded mentoring.
- Continue to advocate for mentoring at the local, state, and federal levels in a way that individual programs cannot by themselves.
- Advocate for more workforce development and career exploration focused mentoring opportunities.



CONVENE & COLLABORATE

- Support a larger mentoring network in the state by leveraging the expertise and experiences of local coalitions, networks, and program hubs to advance mentoring practices.
- Provide advertising and communication support for mentoring programs, especially in rural areas, and help to increase awareness of programs based in regions outside of metro areas.
- Incorporate and engage more mentoring champions, speakers/local celebrities, community advocates, and youth to grow the mentoring movement in Nebraska.



PROVIDE PLATFORMS AND SPACES TO EMPOWER YOUTH AND INCORPORATE YOUTH VOICES

- Support programs in creating ways for youth and mentees to give honest feedback. Explore opportunities for mentee-to-mentee relationships and conversations.





MAPPING PROJECT SUMMARY

For more than 20 years, MENTOR Nebraska has led the mentoring movement to ensure youth and mentors have access to high-quality experiences - first as Midlands Mentoring Partnership and now as a statewide organization. **The 2021 MENTOR Nebraska Mapping Project further fuels this work by providing a snapshot of mentoring in Nebraska's communities and an inventory of existing programming.** Through a strengths-based questionnaire and analysis of county and school district data, the project estimates the size and scope of Nebraska's mentoring sector and details location, program design, objectives, audiences, community conditions, and areas for future growth.

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

MENTOR Nebraska's mapping project combines an original questionnaire with publicly available quantitative data to inventory mentoring services and conditions across the state. Using generally accepted research principles, we gathered open-source information regarding community and school district conditions and administered a strengths-based questionnaire. Survey questions asked organizations to share the size, scope, focus, services, audience, and location of the mentoring activities offered. Questions were developed based on the mapping goals, best practices, and surveys used by MENTOR Nebraska's network partners in other states, including MENTOR Maryland | DC.

To inventory the services offered by organizations across the state, MENTOR Nebraska invited organizations to complete a 32-question questionnaire regarding existing mentoring programs and plans for the future. In doing so, MENTOR Nebraska was transparent about its goal to map mentoring resources currently operating across the state of Nebraska and in order to shape future services.

All mentoring programs serving the state of Nebraska that we were aware of at the time were invited to participate and respond to the online questionnaire. The survey was distributed to 136 organizations plus coalitions with awareness of mentoring programs. In total, 60 organizations responded including all 14 MENTOR Nebraska member partners. The organizations represented in the mapping report encompass diverse programmatic models, including stand-alone, embedded programs in nonprofits, programs that utilize mentoring principles in their service delivery, and other spaces that serve as "mentor-rich" relationship hubs.



GIRLS INC OF OMAHA

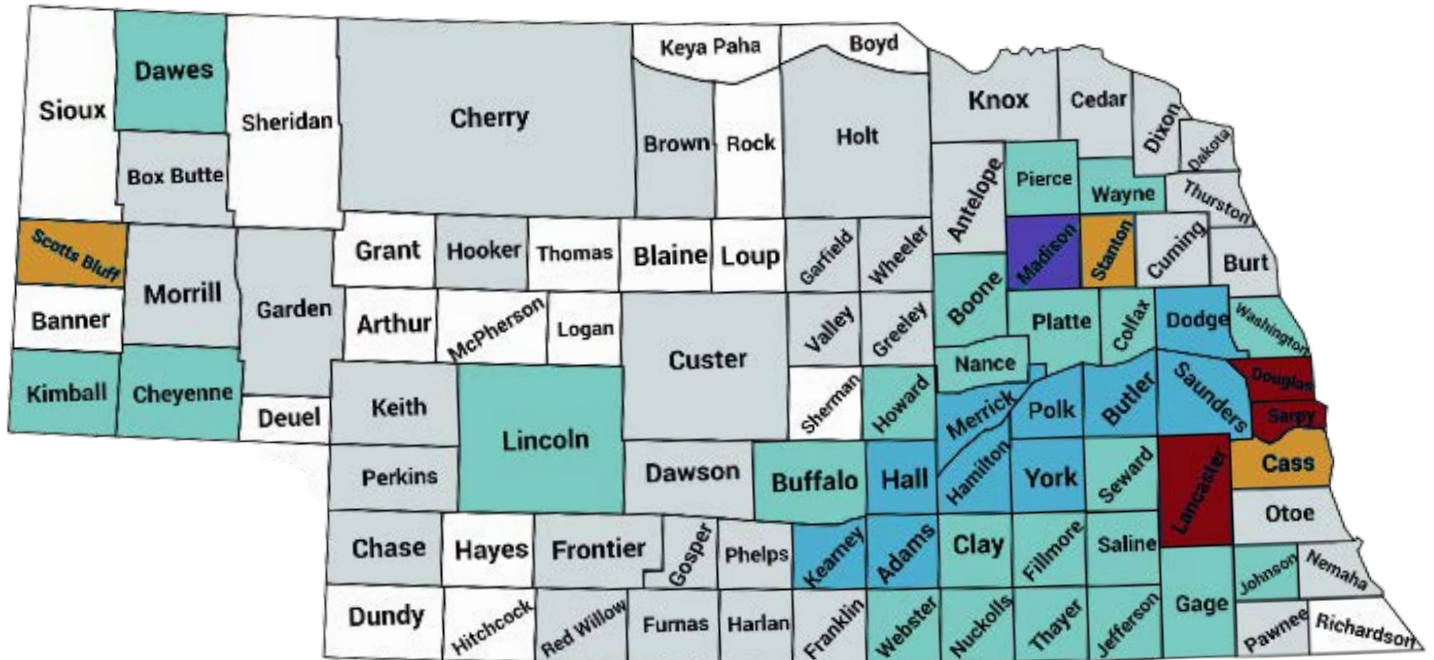


SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

NEBRASKA'S MENTORING SECTOR

Based on the mapping report, 60 organizations offered these insights about the mentoring sector:

- Youth largely become involved in mentoring through self-referral or caregiver referral
- Most programs serve high school and/or middle school aged youth
- One-on-one and group mentoring are the most common forms of mentoring
- Nonmember organizations are more likely to offer peer-to-peer and virtual mentoring
- Most programs seek to enhance social emotional skills, support general youth development, and provide caring adult relationships



of Organizations Providing Mentoring by County



MENTORING BY THE NUMBERS

Based on feedback and analysis, there are at least 139 distinct mentoring programs actively operating in Nebraska. Organizations generally provide two mentoring programs, although at least 12 organizations provide three or more programs. Mentoring is offered at least 1,182 physical sites, including nonprofits, churches, juvenile justice facilities, and schools. Some organizations reported serving just a handful of youth annually, while others reported serving 10,000 or more. In total, more than 22,000 individuals are connected to mentoring programming in Nebraska. Youth served through mentoring were most commonly reported as white (28%), Black (24%), and Hispanic/Latino (11%). Although it is important to note that 24% of youth racial demographics was reported as unknown.



139
Programs



1,182
Sites



22,000
Youth

Youth Race

28% White

24% Black

11% Hispanic/Latino

6% 2+ Races

3% Asian

3% Other

1% American Indian/Alaska Native

<1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

24% Unknown*

**Info not shared by youth or data not collected by program*

INCREASING ACCESS TO MENTORING

To identify opportunities for expansion of mentoring, 15 community and academic indicators were analyzed, including poverty rates, juvenile justice system involvement, educational attainment, cost per pupil, free and reduced lunch, and school attendance rates among others. The data points to 14 potential school districts to center expansion of mentoring services to increase access to mentoring relationships.

- 1. Hastings Public Schools**
- 2. Alliance Public Schools**
- 3. So Sioux City Community Schools**
- 4. Lexington Public Schools**
- 5. Fremont Public Schools**
- 6. Ralston Public Schools**
- 7. Omaha Public Schools**
- 8. Franklin Public Schools**
- 9. Norfolk Public Schools**
- 10. Crete Public Schools**
- 11. Scottsbluff Public Schools**
- 12. Mitchell Public Schools**
- 13. Morrill Public Schools**
- 14. Minatare Public Schools**





QUALITY MENTORING PRACTICES

Mentoring works best when steps are taken to ensure program practices meet quality standards that are safe and effective. MENTOR's cornerstone publication, the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring, is a collection of research-informed practices for youth mentoring programs. These elements are widely accepted in the United States as the defining document on programmatic standards for the youth mentoring field. **The elements and the practices they promote have been extensively examined in major research studies of mentoring programs and have been shown to be important predictors of positive outcomes for youth.**

The tremendous growth in the youth mentoring field has resulted in an ever-expanding number of programs that provide choice, flexibility, and increased opportunities for young people who need mentors. However, the sheer number and variety of programs and approaches make it difficult for prospective mentors, parents, mentees, funders, and policymakers to know what constitutes a safe and effective mentoring program. **The National Quality Mentoring System (NQMS) creates recognized standards and procedures for the operation of high-quality mentoring programs based on evidence and a process for continuous improvement within a program.**

Through NQMS, MENTOR Nebraska assists mentoring programs across Nebraska in identifying existing quality practices, acknowledging areas for improvement, and developing action plans to meet national standards, while providing ongoing training and support to achieve program goals. MENTOR Nebraska also regularly hosts trainings on EEP for mentoring programs.



4TH EDITION

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™

RESEARCH-INFORMED AND PRACTITIONER-APPROVED BEST PRACTICES FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING IMPACTFUL MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS AND STRONG PROGRAM SERVICES

92%

of MENTOR Nebraska's member partners reported being familiar with the *Elements of Best Practices*

VS

50%

of nonmembers

STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

As part of the strengths-based assessment, organizations shared their current strengths, goals for the future, and challenges that might impede progress.

STRENGTHS

PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration was most frequently cited as a factor that influences an organization's ability to provide mentoring services in the community. Organizations indicated relationships with schools, coaches, nonprofit organizations, mental health professionals, and others are a key external strength.

PRIORITY TO INTENTIONALLY SERVE SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

The majority of mentoring programs identified their top target populations for existing and future services are young people who are:

- Justice-involved
- First-generation college going
- LGBTQIA

Looking ahead, nonmember organizations were especially interested in serving first generation college going, higher education, and gender specific programming. In addition to the overall target populations, MENTOR Nebraska's member partners placed emphasis in mentoring programs for refugees and new Americans.

DESIRE TO GROW

Programs indicated their desire to provide different types of mentoring, reach other communities, and/or increase the number of matches.

STAFF REPRESENTATION & CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Internally, organizations were proud to highlight staff representation and cultural competency –emphasizing unique experiences and connections to community. These strengths are especially important as organizations seek to reach new target populations.

CHALLENGES

FUNDRAISING

Raising funds to support operations was identified as a universal challenge for programs.

RECRUITING MENTORS

Across programs, there is a need for more mentors, especially BIPOC and male mentors, as well as mentors from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Involving and engaging parents and guardians in mentoring is a common challenge. Programs shared a desire for help communicating the benefits of mentoring and building additional buy-in among parents and guardians.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Programs want more support with program evaluation, especially to help demonstrate that programs are evidence based and/or that non-traditional models have a benefit for youth.

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN MENTORS

Although staff representation and organizational cultural competency was identified as a common strength, many organizations also shared that this strength does not extend into recruitment. Nearly half of MENTOR Nebraska member partners say they are not able to recruit mentors that match the demographics of their participants, which is approximately one third African American.



FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW SUMMARY

To fully understand the state of mentoring in Nebraska, MENTOR Nebraska captured feedback from a cross section of stakeholder groups that intersect with mentoring. **Equivolve facilitated virtual focus groups and interviews with these stakeholders to gather insight on strengths, emerging opportunities, and other information about the state's mentoring landscape.** The goal of these focus groups and interviews was to:

- Hear honest opinions about what works and doesn't work related to mentoring in the state of Nebraska and related to MENTOR Nebraska.
- Capture ideas and opinions to inform what roles MENTOR Nebraska can and should play in the landscape.
- Capture ideas and innovations that could inform the direction of MENTOR Nebraska and support its mission.
- Assess clarity of messaging about MENTOR Nebraska's identity and role.
- Inform fundraising strategy.

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

During the fall of 2021, Equivolve facilitated 6 virtual interviews and 4 virtual focus groups which consisted of 15 organizations and 19 individuals, including:

- **Funders**
- **Board members**
- **Partners in the education and juvenile justice sectors**
- **Member organizations**
- **Nonmember organizations**
- **Young adults**

The individuals and organizations represented in the focus groups and interviews encompass voices from across Nebraska, including both rural and urban settings.

Focus groups were conducted based on the stakeholder's expertise and/or field, including:

- **Education**
Different roles within school districts – administration, social work, support services
- **Juvenile Justice**
Spectrum of juvenile justice involvement
- **Youth**
Connected to mentoring through programs or naturally occurring relationships
- **MENTOR Nebraska member organizations**
Both large and small, urban, rural, different models
- **Nonmember organizations**
Programs or organizations that are not currently engaged as member organizations - both large and small, urban, rural, different models

Feedback from the focus groups and interviews was analyzed to capture patterns, themes, and ideas.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Each group provided feedback and suggestions that connected across four topics:



Program & Organizational Support



Mentors, Recruitment & Models



MENTOR Nebraska's Role & Presence



Advocacy & Fundraising





The following section includes insight and feedback related to the types of support MENTOR Nebraska can or should provide and to be mindful of in order to further increase their impact and effectiveness.

CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES

Programs desire more support with program evaluation, especially to help demonstrate that programs are evidence based and/or that non-traditional models have a benefit for youth.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Source, research, and provide additional curriculum, guides, and resources tailored to small mentoring programs in rural areas.
- Assist and support organizations with program evaluations.
- Consider flexibility around reporting requirements, particularly for rural mentor programs, and those with limited staff and capacity.
- Request both qualitative and quantitative data to help with fundraising efforts.

COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF MENTORING

More resources are needed to better communicate the benefits of being a mentor, what is needed in order to become one, and the value of an organization to meet mentoring standards.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop a hub of resources for programs, mentors, parents/caregivers, and families.

EXPAND TRAINING OFFERINGS

Additional trainings and resources are needed related to race, diversity, gender identity, disability, trauma informed care, evidence-based practices, etc.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to offer and develop more trainings around the following:
 - Trauma informed care (especially for youth involved in justice-system and foster care system)
 - Behavioral & mental health and substance use
 - Social-emotional learning
 - Sexual health, gender, identity, race, and diversity
 - Being vulnerable, including guidance for mentors (particularly male mentors) on how to develop and cultivate mentor-mentee relationships
 - Communication styles and restorative practices
 - Political and social environments and the changes that occur along with them
 - Difficult conversations and dynamics between mentors-mentees

COVID-19 PROGRAM SUPPORT

Mentors and mentoring programs need more support navigating pandemic restrictions.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Help programs navigate COVID restrictions, including shifting to virtual platforms and finding ways to provide support.
- Be responsive to programs in rural areas that already experience challenges around connecting and maintaining a physical presence.



MENTORS, RECRUITMENT & MODELS

The following section includes insight and feedback related to the engagement, recruitment, and diversity of mentors, mentees, other associated programs.

REPRESENTATION

There is a need for more mentors, especially BIPOC and male mentors, and mentors from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Youth benefit from having a mentor who they can relate to and has shared experience and/or interests. This is especially true for youth in the juvenile justice system.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Diversify the organizations, businesses, and spaces that mentors can come from, including:
 - Individuals with careers or skills that are entrepreneurial, trade based, or function within informal economies
 - Youth centered and/or led organizations
 - BIPOC and women-led organizations
 - Trade based skills that especially helpful for programs located in rural regions
- Support more youth-initiated mentoring models, especially for justice involved youth.
- Encourage young people still in school to act as guides, confidants, and mentors for their peers.

RECRUITING AND RETAINING MENTORS

Programs need more mentors who are available during work hours, particularly for youth in the juvenile justice system. A mentor's ability to leave the "office" during working hours can be a challenge and an opportunity to partner with organizations and

businesses to encourage employees to mentor without the concern of repercussions and/or loss of pay.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage organizations and businesses to allow staff to have flexibility to provide mentoring during work and school hours.
- Advocate for paid leave to businesses at the state and federal level.
- Help programs rethink where mentors are meeting young people.
 - Schools find that recruiting individuals already located and working in schools is helpful and provides easier access for young people to become engaged.
 - On the other hand, some students and mentees may not feel comfortable or safe in their classrooms or schools so create space for these individuals to meet outside of the school environment.

NORMALIZE MENTORING FOR EVERYONE

Every young person can benefit from the support of a mentor.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Explore mentoring programs geared towards parents, families, support systems, immigrant and refugee families, including assistance with navigating educational databases and services, technology and devices, counseling, etc.
- Start mentoring at an earlier age by engaging elementary and middle school students.
- Include more youth voices into curriculum and messaging by providing opportunities for mentors and mentees to submit and provide feedback via polls, surveys, peer-to-peer conversations, and youth advisory groups.

**“YOUNG PEOPLE’S VOICES
NEED TO BE HEARD
AUTHENTICALLY
FOR WHAT THEY ARE
AND NOT DILUTED...”**

**YOUNG PEOPLE DON’T JUST
WANT A SEAT AT THE TABLE,
WE WANT OUR OWN TABLE
AND OUR OWN SEATS.”**

*Meg Zeenat Wamithi
MENTOR Black Youth Town Hall*





MENTOR NEBRASKA'S ROLE & PRESENCE

The following section includes considerations related to MENTOR Nebraska's physical and virtual presence to further assist and support programs. This includes MENTOR Nebraska's program expansion to rural areas, organizations and entities, and internal growth of the board and staff.

PHYSICAL PRESENCE

While mentoring programs acknowledge the efforts being made to increase MENTOR Nebraska's presence in rural and western Nebraska, more work needs to be done to build trust in those communities.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand reach to other parts of the state, not just metropolitan areas.
- Encourage other urban and metro-based mentoring programs to also expand and/or collaborate to reach other geographic regions and programs.
- Diversify board representation, whether regional, demographic, or by adding young people.
- Hire staff members who are based in rural and western areas of the state and having staff attend mentoring organization's events in those areas to show support.
- Establish field or satellite offices outside of metro and urban areas

SYSTEM INTEGRATION

There are barriers and red tape that prevent justice-involved youth from having access to mentors, including:

- Hesitancy from parents and guardians to agree and be open to mentoring because it could potentially expose the intimacies of home life, relationships, social and economic status, and familial complexities.
- Lack of diverse mentors and challenges for young people to relate to the mentors already engaged.
- Data collection and background checks for mentors are often a barrier or deterrent to recruit mentors who have lived experience but are unable to become a mentor because of their legal history.
- Prisons and detention centers operate within the state's education schedule, meaning mentors need to be available during school hours or on Saturdays and Sundays in order for youth to access the services. Because of the lack of transportation, available hours for mentors to visit within business hours, and lack of financial assistance, it is difficult to recruit and consistently sustain mentors.
- Some government and federal institutions are unable to provide the funding needed for transportation, gas, phone calls, reimbursements, etc. for mentors, mentees, and families.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase integration of mentoring in child welfare and justice system spaces, including youth in the foster care system, detention centers, and other justice-involved youth.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Systemic and growing inequity manifests as gaps in opportunity, networks, and access to adult relationships outside of families. Mentoring unites us. Relationships bring us together and navigate us to greater connection and opportunity.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Be more intentional with incorporating DEI principles and standards and hold organizations accountable to these principles.
- Take into consideration programs located in areas/regions that may be more conservative and adjust the language to encourage participation and education without pushing them away.

**“IF WE MERGE
MERCY WITH MIGHT,
AND MIGHT WITH RIGHT,
THEN LOVE
BECOMES OUR LEGACY
AND CHANGE FOR
OUR CHILDREN’S BIRTHRIGHT.”**

Amanda Gorman





ADVOCACY & FUNDRAISING

The following section includes suggestions for how to advocate for organizations and programs across Nebraska at the local, state, and federal level, and across programs within the mentoring network. This includes opportunities for fundraising and financial support from government and philanthropic entities, as well as from MENTOR Nebraska.

ADVOCACY

Most mentoring programs do not have the capacity or resources to advocate on an individual level.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to advocate for mentoring at the local, state, and federal levels in a way that individual programs cannot by themselves.
- Push for policies that support quality and the expansion of mentoring programs.
- Advocate for state and federal funding to support mentoring in:
 - Foster care systems
 - Justice systems
 - Rural and low-income areas
 - Statewide fundraising campaigns

FUNDRAISING

Funding can be difficult to obtain because it can be funneled through larger organizations. It can create a competition between various mentoring programs, and limit the opportunities and dollars for smaller, more rural programs to access funds.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase the number of sustainable funding sources for mentoring programs across the state.



- Support non-traditional mentoring programs that serve a smaller number of young people but for extended periods of time, rather than a high volume of mentees over a short period of time.
- Increase the amount of grants and financial assistance that mentoring programs have access to.
- Provide non-financial support such as:
 - Performance evaluations support
 - Professional match photo shoots
 - Messaging, communications, and advertising
 - Connections to speakers and mentoring “champions”
 - Websites and technology
 - Storytelling, and
 - Other in-kind resources

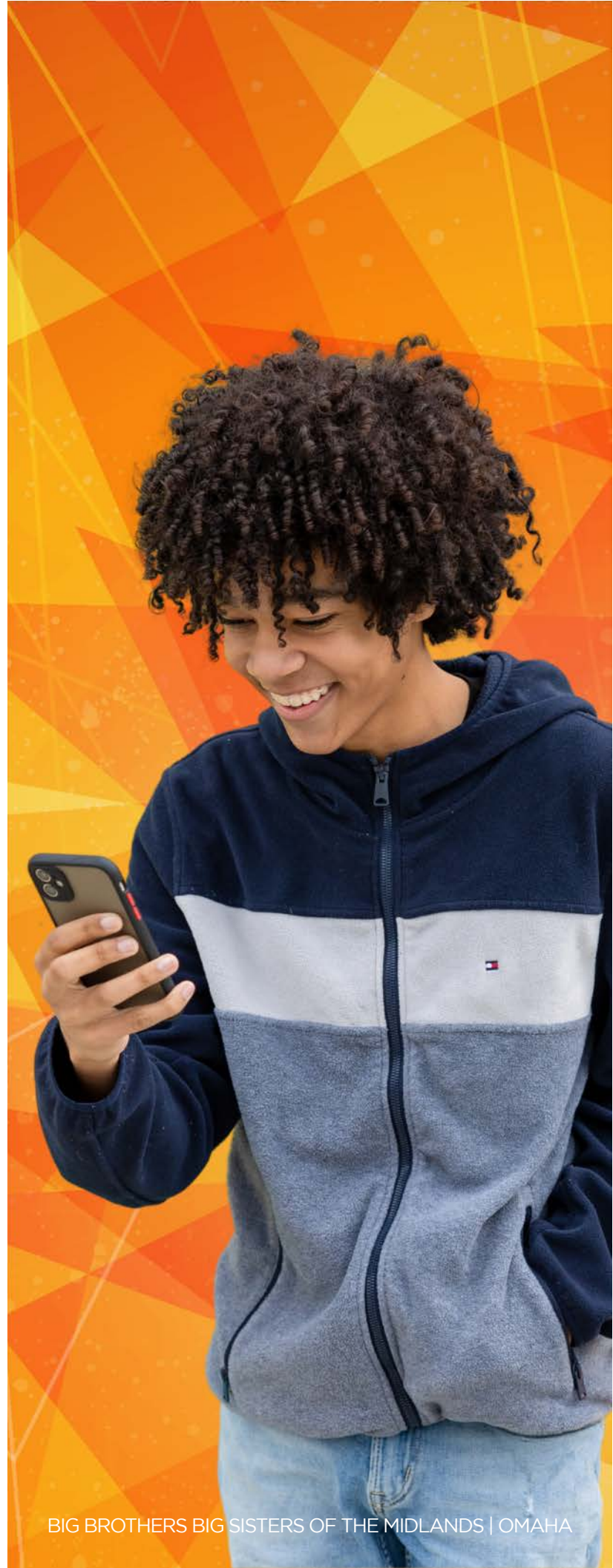
STATEWIDE CONVENING

Stakeholders look to MENTOR Nebraska as a mentoring hub and convener in Nebraska.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support a larger mentoring network in the state by leveraging the expertise and experiences of local coalitions, networks, and program hubs to advance mentoring practices.
- Lift up smaller, rural, and non-traditional mentoring organizations at the mentoring table.
- Encourage respect, inclusion, and relationships between bigger mentoring organizations and those that are smaller or non-traditional.
- Create linkages with existing statewide organizations, coalitions, and hubs.
- Engage with additional partners, particularly outside of Omaha and Lincoln.
- Create a statewide volunteer advisory board to focus on communication, messaging, and assist with fundraising.
- Incorporate and prioritize youth voices and involvement.
- Allow opportunities for community members and advocates.



CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

CONCLUSION

In 2021, MENTOR Nebraska led an in-depth analysis of the current state of mentoring in Nebraska. This report is MENTOR Nebraska's effort to reflect back to you, the mentoring community and its supporters, what we heard. These findings will help shape programmatic offerings as well as the types of support that stakeholders provide to the mentoring community. It is clear that many programs across Nebraska are working diligently to create lasting connections that contribute to the overall wellbeing and success of youth and are often doing so with limited resources.

We are challenged as a sector to grow and evolve with social factors, learning environments, technological changes, and other issues that impact young people in our state. We must also respond to what we hear from young people themselves - that they want their voices amplified in the work of our sector. After all, if mentoring is truly centered in the interests of young people, their voices should be a part of decision making and found in authentic dialogue about how we show up for them as mentors, programs, and a sector. MENTOR Nebraska is uniquely positioned to support this work and we look forward to the partnership that lies ahead of us to make this critical work happen.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and recommendations included in this report highlight areas of work for MENTOR Nebraska to consider moving forward:



Support program growth in regions with high need and limited opportunity



Advance best practices across the state through no-cost training and consulting

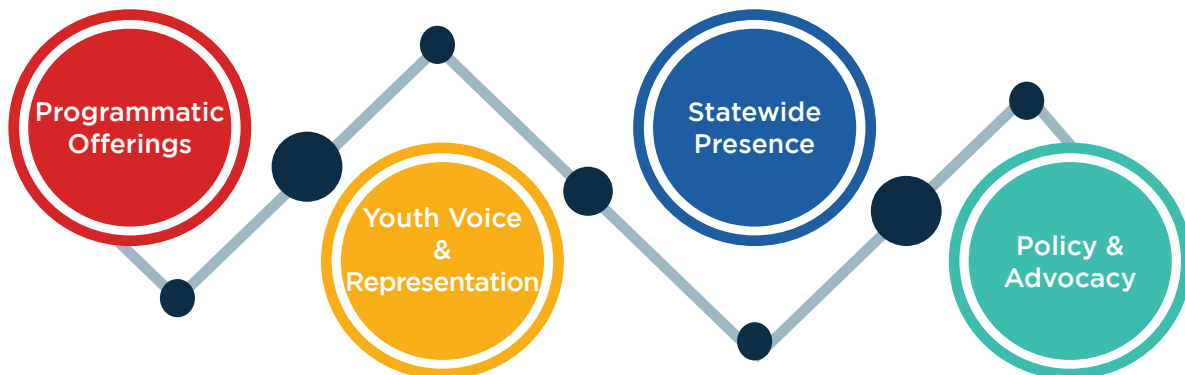


Elevate BIPOC mentor recruitment



Support efforts to offer unique programming for diverse populations

The process also revealed four areas most critical for MENTOR Nebraska to focus its next phase of growth. Shared across the 75 external stakeholders that participated in the statewide survey and interviews, and informed by the experience and expertise of the staff and board, these themes will become the top four priority areas for MENTOR Nebraska's strategic plan which will be released in July 2022.



Stay up to date on MENTOR Nebraska's strategic plan, impact, trainings, and news by visiting www.MENTORNebraska.org.



MENTOR NEBRASKA

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