

It takes **all** of us.



# Community Listening Project

January 2021



## Mission



Facilitate equitable growth in academics, social emotional skills, and self-esteem through mutually beneficial mentoring relationships. We believe in cultivating a brave space that amplifies the voices of young agents of change in a diverse and inclusive community.

## Vision



Be a leading nonprofit for fostering belonging alongside young people, families, and community.

*This report is a summary of Affinity Mentoring's 2021 Community Listening Project. It does not include all action steps, goals, or survey questions. This is not to be distributed or reproduced without permission from Affinity Mentoring. Our full board-approved Strategic Plan for 2021-2024 will be released July 2021.*

# Community Listening Project



Affinity Mentoring is an organization in Grand Rapids and Wyoming that supports young people connecting with mentors. Mentors are more than tutors; they help students with homework, talk about things that are important to students, are great listeners, and are safe, adult friends. We want to be excellent at the work that we do, and do work that matters to the community. Which is why we solicited feedback.

Findings from this survey will be used to help us listen well to what the community needs, and how the community wants us to use our resources.

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## Overview



While launching our updated mission and vision statements in January 2021 we realized that we needed to be held actively accountable to these statements by opening ourselves up to feedback, critique, and ideas in new and regular ways. We cannot fulfill our mission and vision without listening to our community members.

As we dream past these pandemic days, anticipating new challenges and opportunities, we launched a new **Community Listening Survey** as a step in creating a regular cycle of public feedback on our work, and giving power to the community to speak into where we will direct our resources and which projects we will prioritize.

- ▶ In three weeks we received nearly 100 public submissions;
- ▶ 22% of which came directly from families with students receiving mentoring; and
- ▶ 34% of which were from current or past mentors.

We acknowledge and validate that simply collecting public survey data is not enough, and is regularly used to give organizations credibility while continuing with their own agendas, and/or to strip the wisdom and learned experience from community members without acknowledgement or compensation.

**Therefore, we commit to the following standards and invite you to tell us if we are not holding ourselves accountable to them:**

- ▶ To take all feedback seriously;
- ▶ To review all feedback equitably, giving the highest regard to the ideas and opinions of those most directly impacted by our work;
- ▶ To view all feedback and experiences as valid and true, never dismissing someone because they hold a different experience than someone else or even the majority;
- ▶ To consistently and regularly find opportunities to adjust and direct our programming as requested by the community;
- ▶ To regularly pair our own explanation of our work alongside the community's evaluation of our work, including critique;
- ▶ To work to avoid exploiting community wisdom and talent without compensation by being clear about the use of research, how it will impact the community, what we intend to do with data, and offering compensation for expertise whenever possible;
- ▶ To never assume that we are experts in someone else's life experience, but to allow each person to be the expert of their own experience.

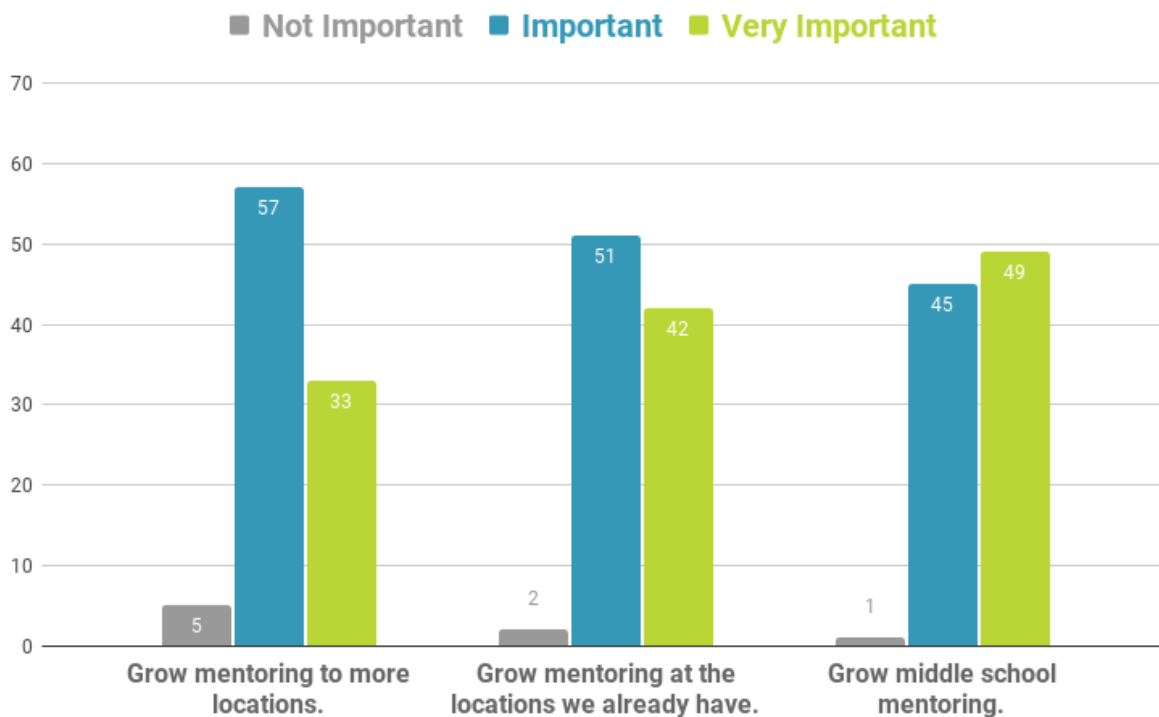
We are grateful for our community and feel honored to be able to partner alongside organizations, community members, schools, families, and students towards more equitable futures for young people.

**Cassandra Kiger, Executive Director**  
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# Community + Growth

**Give space and priority for the community to determine and support the future of Affinity Mentoring.\***

- ▶ 98% of respondents believe Affinity’s work is important to our community
- ▶ 79% of respondents believe Affinity is fulfilling its purpose (see mission and vision)



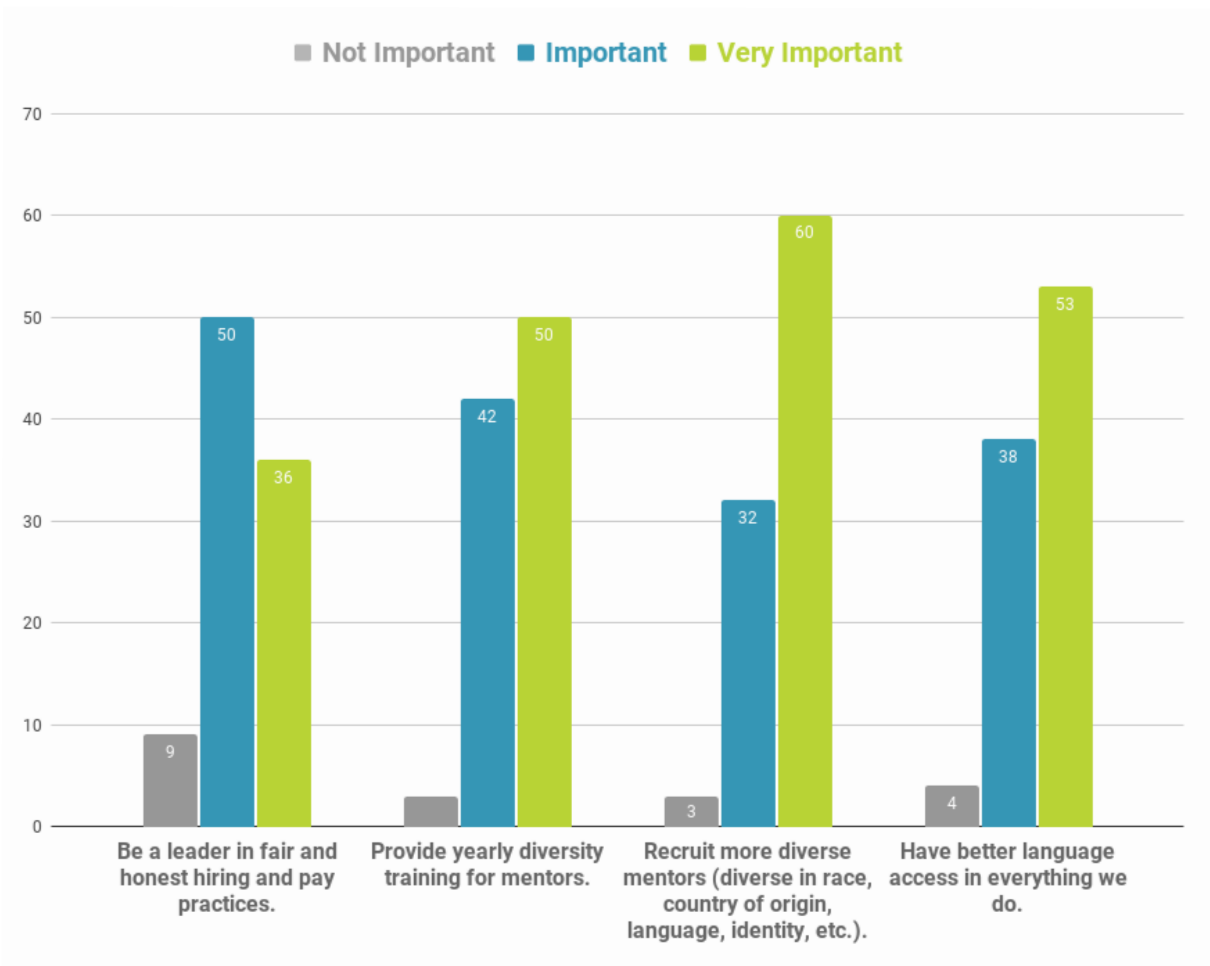
## Action Steps Examples

- ▶ Ensure varied and consistent financial sustainability to ensure consistency and follow through in all programming.
- ▶ Increase programming capacity based on school relationships and community support (such as local neighborhoods, higher education institutions, and organizations)
- ▶ Pilot Middle School Mentoring Steering Committee and launch a communications campaign highlighting specific needs of Middle School mentees and the Social Emotional need after COVID-19
- ▶ Add key community members to board of directors and committees (BIPOC business owners, mentor and/or school alumni, education leaders) to better represent our service areas in our future growth

*\*Indicates a pillar in Affinity’s upcoming Strategic Plan for July 2021–June 2024. Our full board-approved Strategic Plan for will be released July 2021.*

# Equity

Make equity the foundation of every aspect of work and decision-making at Affinity Mentoring.\*



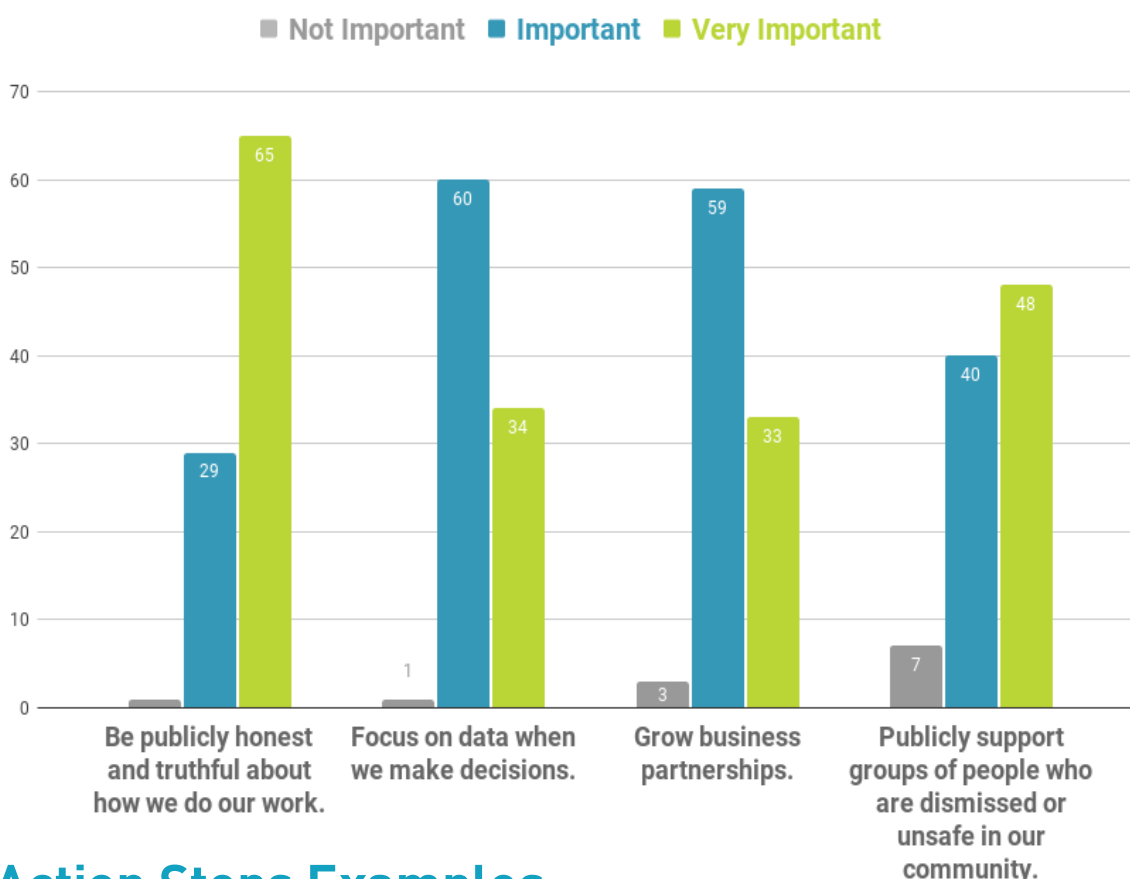
## Action Steps Examples

- ▶ Improve equity standards and provide living and worth reflective wages for all positions
- ▶ Build Internal DEI staff-board team
- ▶ Provide all materials and events in English and Spanish
- ▶ Expand DEI training/growth for mentors
- ▶ Review accessibility at all organizational levels (programming, administrative, board of directors, etc.) for greater inclusivity

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## Decision-Making

Create a regular cycle of public feedback on our work, and giving power to the community to speak into where we will direct our resources and which projects we will prioritize.\*



### Action Steps Examples

- ▶ Improve procedures/data/automatizing resulting in new database system to streamline and reduce administrative costs while ensuring quality programming
- ▶ Strong focus on improving and utilizing data for decision-making
- ▶ Identify gaps in corporate partnerships with certain communities (IE small and/or BIPOC owned businesses)
- ▶ Develop public support plan and follow up actions for groups of people in our service areas who are often dismissed or unsafe in our community (IE immigrant, LGBTQIA, and Black communities)

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# Feedback Review Process



We are committed to transparency, feedback, and following up. We review all feedback; however, that does not necessarily mean we immediately make the changes requested. Our process for determining change based on feedback is as follows:

## Solicitation of Feedback

- ▶ We strive to include all of our participating community in our learning and growth towards being a more equitable and inclusive organization.
- ▶ We are always open to and encourage conversation and dialogue around any topic; none of us knows everything, and we can all learn from each other.

## Acknowledgement

- ▶ We acknowledge all feelings and experiences as real and valid for that individual.
- ▶ Our intent is never to directly cause or incite anger, but we will not make changes simply because of someone's anger.

## Guiding Principles

- ▶ We consistently return to our mission and vision as guiding statements.
- ▶ When we do something wrong we will own it, apologize, work to repair relationships harmed, and work to change for the future.

## Prioritize Stakeholders

- ▶ We prioritize change based on the needs and experiences of students and families first, then mentors and staff, then the community and donors.
- ▶ We make decisions that honor and cherish the diverse and complex experiences of students and families.
- ▶ When a relationship does end, we work to end it well and with the door remaining open.

## Systems-Level Change

- ▶ We strive to make choices that make our community better at the highest systems level possible, even if that is harder for us in the short term.
- ▶ We are committed towards following up, giving more thorough and better explanations, and continuing conversations when the reasoning behind our decisions is unclear.

## Qualitative Data

“Porque solo con verdaderas relaciones podemos formar redes de soporte.” (Because only with true relationships can we form support networks.)

“Vivimos en tiempos difíciles y es bueno que continuemos fomentando el amor por nuestra comunidad y los niños que son el futuro de nuestra comunidad y nuestro país.” (We live in difficult times and it is good that we continue to foster love for our community and the children who are the future of our community and our country.)

“Affinity has helped my daughter to trust others at school.”

“Having someone to talk to outside of your family can go a long way in the community.”

“Positive adult role models are so impactful to kids, helping them believe in themselves and grow in confidence as they discover who they are and how they can contribute to the world.”



# Methodology + Framework



No data collection is unbiased and active measures must be taken to reduce and limit the project lead creating leading questions or finding the results that they intend to.

## **We used following data collection techniques/resources to frame the way in which we approached this project:**

- ▶ Transformative Evaluation
- ▶ Asset Based Community Development
- ▶ Pedagogy of the Oppressed

## **We focused on making this survey as accessible as possible to all members of the public and give the most direct access to impact Affinity work by:**

- ▶ The survey taking less than 5 minutes to complete
- ▶ Focusing on a 3rd grade reading level or lower
- ▶ Directly connecting questions to current strategic planning work
- ▶ Using Google Forms for simple and free data collection
- ▶ Keep the survey to 20 questions
- ▶ Providing the survey in English and Spanish (Spanish translation focused on overall comprehension and meaning rather than direct translation)
- ▶ Was built by a team of four internal teammates and was reviewed by Alisha Lauchie and Beca Velazquez-Publes of the Urban Core Collective and modifications were made based on their expertise and experience

## **Data collection took place over a three week period, resulting in:**

- ▶ 80 total responses in English and 15 in Spanish
- ▶ 21 total responses from family of mentees (some from the same household)
- ▶ Five, \$20 visa gift cards sent to selected respondents who were family of mentees
- ▶ All responses were anonymous unless a respondent wanted to qualify for a gift card or be added to our contact list

## Limitations + Future



This project is not perfect and we have myriad ways to grow; we will continue to try to be better as we collect future feedback.

**All responses were solicited digitally, via email lists, social media (LinkedIn and Facebook), emails to community partners and individuals, and direct contacts via email and text message to families.**

- ▶ When the pandemic is no longer a risk factor in data collection, we will collect in-person responses as well.

**The survey was only available in English and Spanish.**

- ▶ We will continue to find resources to expand our language access.

**This was the first time we have ever collected public critique in this manner, and it was not well known by the community.**

- ▶ In the future we will be able to refer back to this survey, as well as build a full internal and external communications plan.

**We were not able to compensate every submission, therefore increasing the risk of exploitation.**

- ▶ We will consider and be open to other options to avoid withdrawing knowledge and expertise from the community without compensation.

**Comments, Questions, or Suggestions? Contact:**

Cassandra Kiger, Executive Director of Affinity Mentoring

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- ▶ Se habla Español

It takes **all** of us.

# affinity mentoring

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This word cloud represents the most used words in the qualitative data section of the Community Listening Project. The bigger the word, the more times it was used in the feedback section.