



2022 Community Listening Project



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 2022 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.

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.

In 2021 we launched our first **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. This year we completed our 2nd annual survey and have compiled the results.

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.

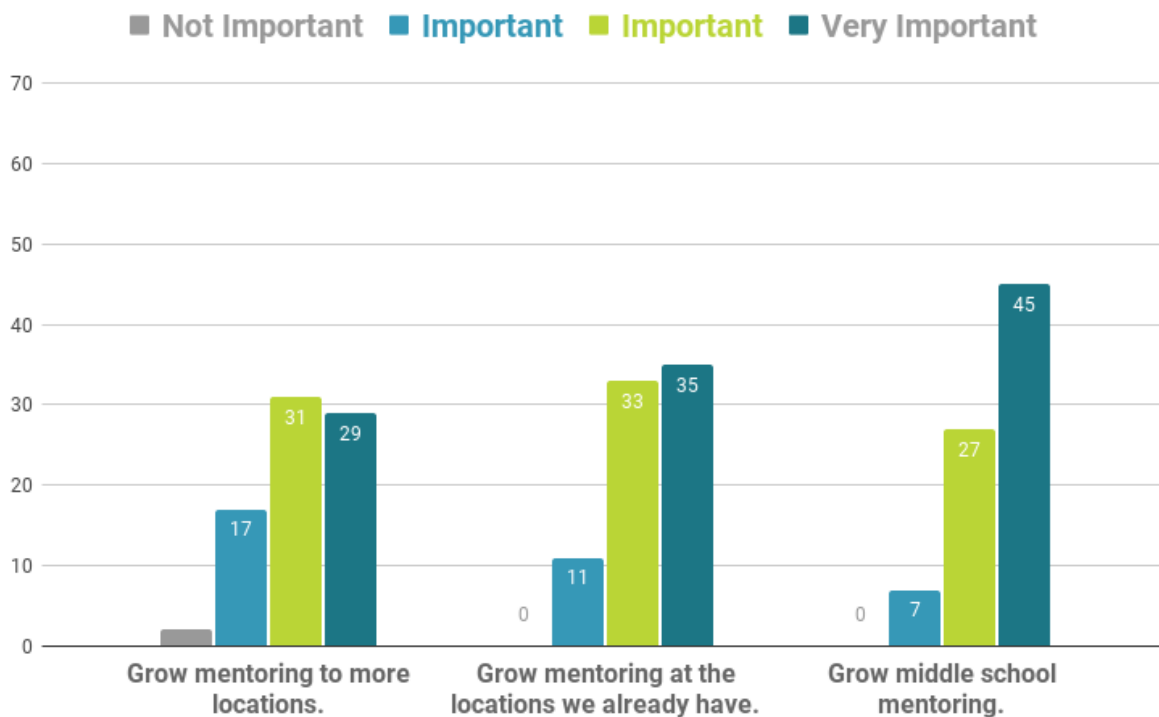
Sincerely,

The Affinity Mentoring Team

Community + Growth

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

- ▶ 100% of respondents believe Affinity’s work is important to our community
- ▶ 87% of respondents believe Affinity is fulfilling its purpose (see mission and vision)



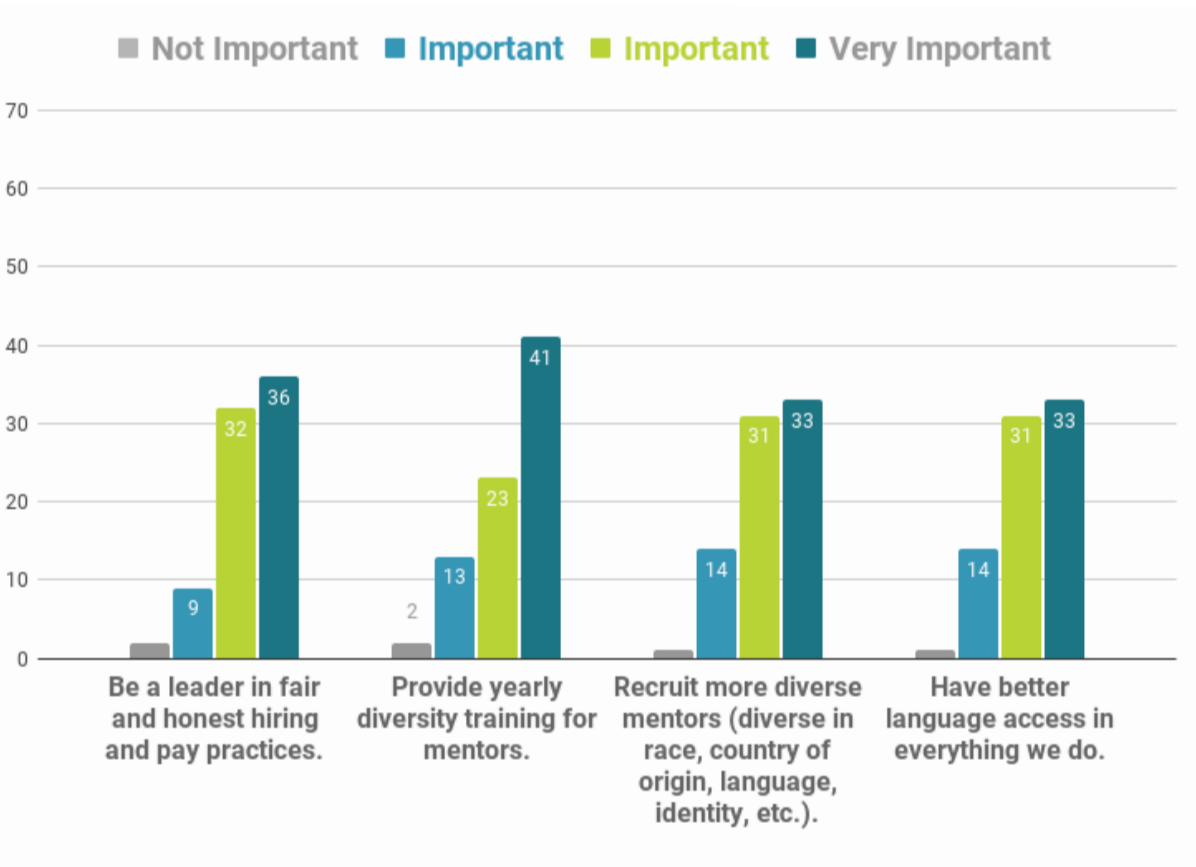
Action Steps Examples

- ▶ Continue expanding 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)
- ▶ Continue and grow Middle School Mentoring Steering Committee
- ▶ Continue creatively diversifying our board of directors and committees, and take first steps towards mentees and families having access to being board members

*Indicates a pillar in Affinity’s Strategic Plan for July 2021–June 2024.

Equity

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



Action Steps Examples

- ▶ Establish clear policies for pay range caps and goals for all positions to ensure long-term sustainability and equity of pay
- ▶ Complete internal DEI organizational assessment and build DEI Committee goals and objectives based on recommendations
- ▶ Begin research on additional languages above and beyond English and Spanish that students and families need access to
- ▶ Continue and grow DEI training for mentors

*Indicates a pillar in Affinity's Strategic Plan for July 2021-June 2024.

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.

Feedback Review Process Cont.



Qualitative Data

“Having a supportive adult who is devoting regular time each week to make a child feel valued, seen, and heard is so impactful. It gives children an opportunity to learn from adults who may be role models and it gives mentors the opportunity to learn from their mentees.”

“Mentoring is a safe place where students can open up, be heard, feel empowered, feel motivated and receive a boost of confidence.”

“Es de mucha ayuda para mi hijo aprender y a desarrollar sus habilidades por eso es muy importante tener mentores en nuestras escuelas.” (“It is very helpful for my son to learn and develop his skills, which is why it’s very important to have mentors in our schools.”)

“Providing mentors to our young people is an important part of supporting mental health and healthy communities.”

“As a single parent, I am keenly aware of how difficult it is to juggle work and provide school support for my own child. Mentoring allows for a child to receive the undivided attention of an adult --- this is often in short supply and contributes to a child’s sense of well being and confidence.”

“I have seen the difference Affinity mentors have made in the lives of my students. On the days they had mentoring, they would be at school and excited.

“It is vital that our young people feel empowered and know that their voices matter! Kids are already important members of our community, having the support of adults helps them to understand this and feel validated as individuals.”

“The students in our community already have so much strength, intelligence, and resilience. Affinity provides them with spaces where they can benefit from a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult, who sees those strengths and encourages them to grow into everything they can be.”

“These are tough times we are living in ... We need to support all the children and youth in our community to give them strength to be their true selves and have opportunities to learn and develop to feel confident that they have an exciting fulfilling life ahead.”

“The influence of a mentor can instill confidence in a student who needs it. Students with positive role models outside of family will be more likely to make good decisions for themselves rather than having an absence of these role models. Their good decisions they make for themselves will benefit the peers around them and the community they live in.”

“Un mentor es muy importante para el aprendizaje de algunos niños que lo necesitan.” (“A mentor is very important for the learning of some children who need it.”)

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:

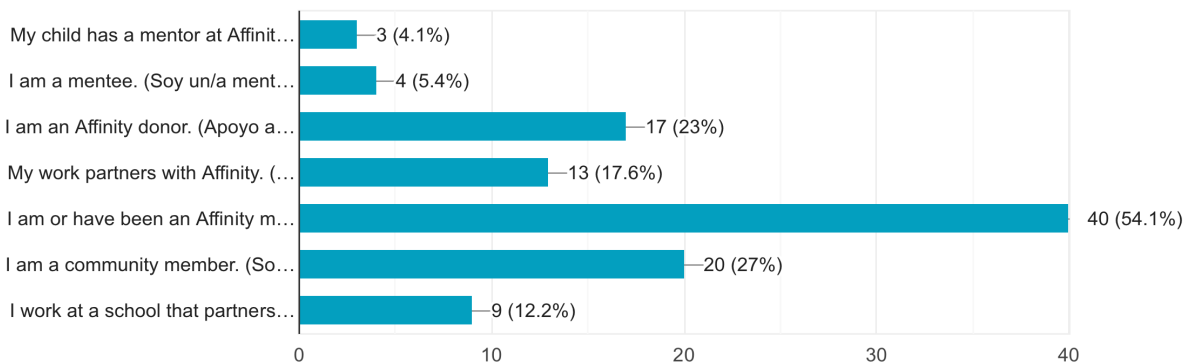
- ▶ The survey taking less than 5 minutes to complete
- ▶ Focusing on a 3rd grade reading level or lower
- ▶ Directly connecting questions to current strategic planning work
- ▶ Using Google Forms for simple and free data collection
- ▶ Providing the survey in English and Spanish (Spanish translation focused on overall comprehension and meaning rather than direct translation)

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

- ▶ 79 total responses

How are you connected to Affinity Mentoring? Check all that apply. (¿Cómo está conectado con Affinity Mentoring? Marque todo lo que corresponda.)

74 responses



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.

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:

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It takes **all** of us.



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