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INTERIOR MINISOTA

The Latest
Program Leader
Supports

This toolkit is aimed at equip mentoring program leaders with practical tools, strategies, and inspiration to strengthen their programs through effective marketing & storytelling, deepen impact through community collaboration, and build confidence and clarity around funding opportunities.

PROGRAM LEADER TOOLKIT

2025

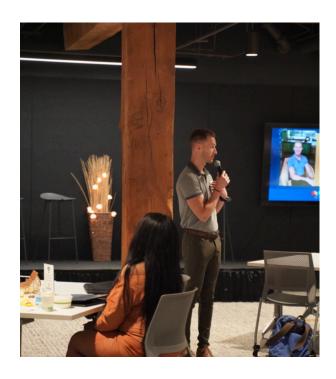
TIPS & TEMPLATES
TO UPLIFT YOUR
WORK













TELLING YOUR **STORY**

Your storytelling identity begins with exploring the following guiding questions:

- What makes you unique? (Mission/Vision)
- What challenges you? What upcoming conflicts exist?
- What are new areas you want to explore? Where can you grow?
- How can collaboration play a part?
- What new voices can be added? "

Stories should include: • Where we've been

- Where we are • Where we are going

It's important to consider the difference between communications & marketing.

Communications aim to inform & drive awareness through created messaging and storytelling.

- Ex. "Hey y'all, we're here!"
- Always ask: Who is the audience & what do we want them to **FEEL**?

Marketing is a call to action.

- Ex. "Donate." "Sign up."
- Ask: Who is the audience & what do we want them to **DO**?

Make Storytelling Work for You

Build trust through a story that links to your brand in both an emotional and realistic way.

- Stories are remembered 22x more than just data points.
- Demonstrates impact. 55% of people are more likely to volunteer when the impact of the work is clearly visible.
- Humanizes work, so much so that donor retention rates are 45% for organizations that tell powerful stories compared to 27% for those that don't.





• Empowers advocates to take action, especially when impact stories are from the POV of young people. - Youth Powered Advocacy Collective

Develop communications strategy for every campaign or event.

- Consider including everyone who needs to be involved in a project, a timeline for the work to be completed, a defined goal for the work and need to have a clear form of measurement.
- Create a Content and Brand Calendar (Editorial)
- Depending on your CTA, determine when to tell your stories and how often.
- Think through when the best times to tell your stories are-
- When will audiences be most / least engaged?
- What theme does the message have?
 What can it tie into?

To learn more, see our <u>resources</u> included access to <u>Kelsey Nelson's slide-deck.</u>









BUILDING CONNECTION

Build Relationships First, Outcomes Second.

There are a couple of things to keep in mind when thinking about building community connection:

- Invest time in getting to *know people and their stories* & not just their roles or organizations.
- Prioritize informal check-ins, community presence, and consistency over transactional engagement.

Why does this matter?
Building **trust** generates
Building **trust** generates
the foundation for honest
dialogue, shared riskdialogue, and long-term
taking, and long-term
impact.

Reasons Cross-Sector Partnerships Are Vital

- Complex problems need shared solutions. Challenges like youth disconnection, mental health, or education gaps are deeply interconnected. Cross-sector partnerships between nonprofits, schools, businesses, healthcare systems, & government agencies allow for holistic, wraparound approaches that are more impactful than siloed efforts.
- Cross-sector partnerships open doors to resources & innovation. The bring diverse tools. perspectives, and funding opportunities the table. When to nonprofits, organizations or agencies' partner beyond their usual circles, they have an opportunity to unlock new innovation possibilities for and sustainability while also building broader community support.

Bridging Cultures, Building Community

In our work, we carry the truth that we do not walk alone. An Anishinaabe teaching "Gakina awiiya" reminds us that we are all related, interconnected not only with one another, but with the land, our ancestors, & future generations. Similarly, there is a well-known saying in Latine communities, "La unión hace la fuerza" unity makes strength. It's a reminder that resilience is rooted in our collective care, and that we are strongest when we show up for one another in community.

When we honor these values in our partnerships, our programs, and our day-to-day interactions, we create space for belonging, reciprocity, & shared power. We are stronger, wiser, & more compassionate together.





Reflection prompts invite moments of gratitude, reciprocity, & relationship-building which is core to a strong mentoring community.

Self-Connection & Purpose

- In the midst of supporting others, how are you nurturing connection with yourself?
- What reminds you why you do this work & what (or who) helps you stay grounded when it gets heavy?

Community Connection & Belonging

- Who in your professional community has influenced or inspired your approach to mentoring?
- What would it mean to reach out & thank them or to offer that same support to someone newer to this work?











CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Approachable funding begins with strategies that center relationships, stay grounded in a clear mission, and focus on long-term sustainability. Here are some tips & tricks shared by Nancy & Brady!

Lead with Relationships, Not Just Requests-

- At the heart of every donation is a human connection. Rather than jumping straight into funding asks, focus on building authentic, trust-based relationships with donors, funders, & community partners. When supporters feel truly seen, valued, and connected to your mission, they're more likely to give ... and give again.
- Start with listening. Send a thank-you before an ask. Invite people into your story, not just your statistics.

Diversify to Build Resilience

- Putting all your eggs in one funding basket is risky. A
 healthy funding strategy weaves together multiple
 streams: individual donors, grants, sponsorships,
 earned income, events, or monthly giving. This
 doesn't mean doing everything—but choosing a few
 that align with your capacity and community.
- Diversity in funding = flexibility in mission delivery when times get tough.

Tell Stories that Move Both Heart & Mind

- Donors want to know their dollars make a difference. Stories grounded in dignity, impact & lived experience are far more memorable than numbers alone. Pair strong data with personal stories that reflect the humanity of your mission.
- Your story is your strength. When people can see themselves in your work, they're more likely to stand with you.

Make Giving Easy & Meaningful

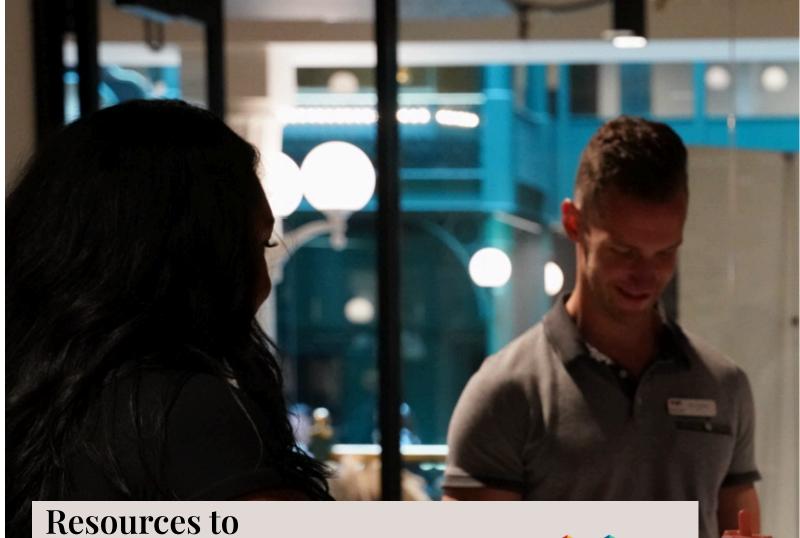
- Barriers, like clunky websites, unclear instructions, or impersonal forms, can lose potential support.
 Create multiple, simple paths to give (online, recurring, by mail, employer match, etc.) and show genuine gratitude each time.
- Consider making giving feel like joining a movement & not just writing a check.

Collaborate to Amplify Impact

• Funders love to see organizations working together. Partnering with others, especially across sectors or with shared values. This can strengthen grant applications, share resources, & expand your reach.

Collaboration isn't just efficient. It can be transformational. It shows funders you are part of a bigger solution.

To learn more, please visit our website or reach out to the **MENTOR Minnesota** team while finding **access to resources**.



Resources to uplift

Resources to support programming broadly:

• https://www.mentormn.org/resources

Marketing & storytelling resources:

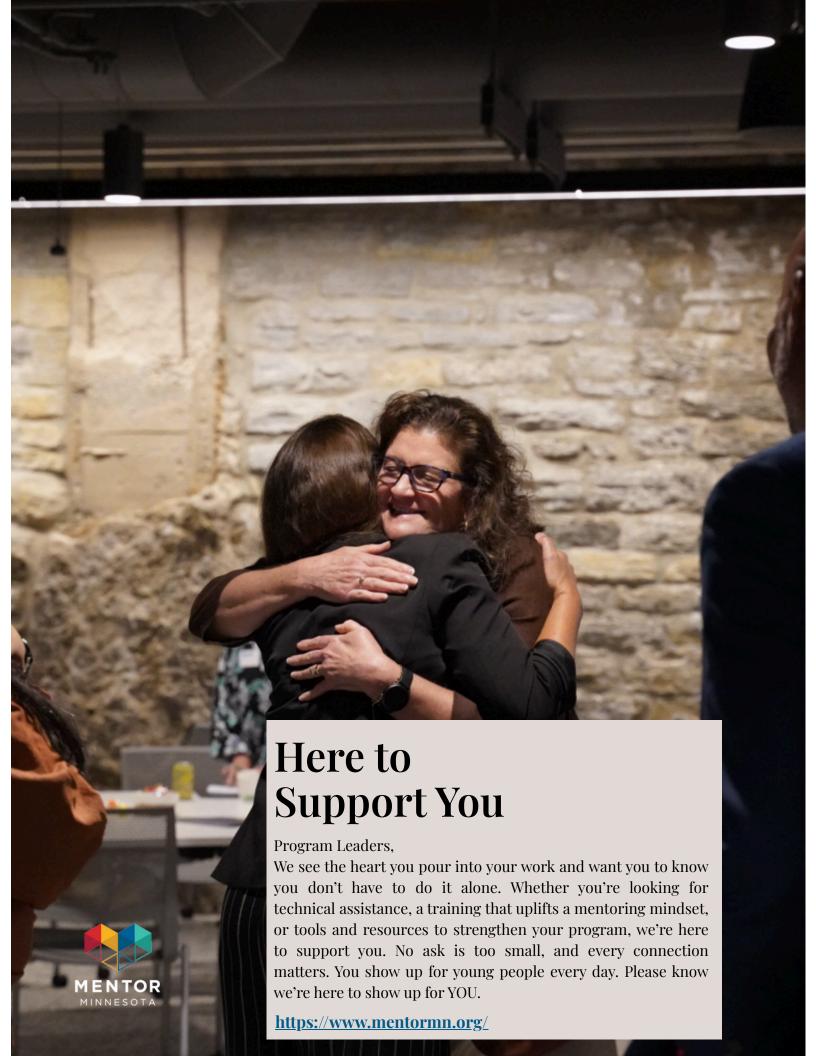
- Access to Kelsey Nelson's PPT: <u>Storytelling: MENTOR Minnesota</u>
- Elements for Effective Practice for Mentoring 5th Ed.

Community Collaboration resources:

• Resources to uplift Community Collaboration Within the Philanthropy Network

Funding support resources:

- Approachable Funding Resources
 - Funding Resources shared by BridgeSpan Group







P.S.
Stay tuned for more info
regarding the 2nd annual
regarding the 2nd annual
MENTOR Minnesoty
Awards & another great
day of professional
development coming in
June 2026!

