

**ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS  
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**



202 West Superior Street, Suite 700  
Duluth, MN 55802  
218.481.7737 Office  
[info@northspan.org](mailto:info@northspan.org) Email

February 22, 2019

Dear Superintendent Gronseth,

Thank you for the opportunity to connect and learn about ISD 709's plans for community discussions and a review of current school attendance area challenges and opportunities. As a firm devoted to community and organizational engagement and development rooted in northeast Minnesota, Northspan combines expertise in facilitation of challenging community conversations and demographic analysis with our knowledge of Duluth Public Schools and the broader community.

The community engagement process will include 9 public meetings at the 9 elementary school locations across the city to generate community input. These sessions will use the District Values Statement as a guiding set of principles and seek to align the selection of new boundaries with the community priorities that emerge from these meetings. We will draw on data from past RSP reports and, if necessary, use our own demographic analysis skillset to supplement our recommendations. Our final report will include proposed boundaries that bring all these elements together into a values-driven document that reflects the community priorities. The timeline to complete this work is 2 to 3 months from approval based on participant schedules.

Our facilitation approach is professional, objective, and inclusive. Northspan will organize and drive this conversation, but you, your board, and the community are responsible for participating and generating the outcomes desired. Elissa Hansen will serve as the principal facilitator for this work, while Karl Schuettler will assist with data analysis and the production of a final report and recommendations to ISD 709. With over twenty years of experience in business & community development, strategic planning, and organizational development, we are well-positioned to assist you with these discussions.

Northspan appreciates the opportunity to assist you with your community engagement and planning efforts. We are pleased to offer the attached proposal for your consideration. If you feel there are any items that are missing or are unnecessary, we welcome the discussion and can consider a different budget number to meet your needs.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elissa Hansen".

Elissa Hansen, MBA, EDFP  
President & CEO

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karl Schuettler".

Karl Schuettler  
Director, Research & Marketing

## **ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

### **GOALS**

- Conduct 9 community engagement sessions over a 2-month time frame
- Develop an understanding of community priorities for school attendance areas through engagement sessions and surveys
- Report on community engagement sessions and recommend new school attendance areas within ISD 709 that align with community and district priorities and values
- Develop a process that will be replicable for future conversations around school attendance areas so the district can continue to update its attendance areas on a more regular basis or as necessary

### **DELIVERABLES**

- Community engagement facilitation services
- Results of engagement session raw notes and surveys
- A summary report of the planning process itself including insights gained, who was involved, any obvious recommendations that emerge, or any red flags for future work and updates
- A presentation of the final report that summarizes all findings and presents recommendations on school attendance areas
- Final written report with recommendations delivered to superintendent

### **APPROACH**

1. Work with the superintendent and/or assigned staff to obtain background information and related materials or data developed to date. These will serve as initial background to help us prepare for the sessions and bring together any recommendations.
2. Choose dates and work with district staff to market community engagement meetings.
3. Develop a schedule of 2-hour community engagement sessions at the 9 elementary school locations over a 2-month time frame that will establish community priorities in the development of school attendance areas.
4. Work with district staff to generate an online and written survey to obtain additional stakeholder input.
5. Present mid-way to the school board and staff on progress.
6. Review existing demographic studies and data on the district.
7. Synthesize community engagement session and survey results with demographic studies and data, with periodic check-ins with the superintendent and support from relevant district staff, to ensure alignment with district priorities and the District Values Statement.
8. Develop recommendations to the school board and staff for future school attendance areas.
9. Draft a report on the results and share with the superintendent for review and feedback.
10. Present a final report recommendations to the ISD 709 School Board and staff.

### **INVESTMENT**

Northspan bills for services on a cost reimbursement basis based upon the hourly rates of professional staff involved, and direct charges and travel associated with the work performed. Northspan President & CEO Elissa Hansen will facilitate this work while Director of Research & Marketing Karl Schuettler will lead the compilation and synthesis of the results for the report. Operations Manager Amanda Vuicich will provide additional support. ISD 709's investment in these services is estimated to be between \$19,900 - \$24,000 depending on the hours spent in revision and is based on the approach and deliverables highlighted above.

## ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

### PROFESSIONAL STAFF

#### **Elissa Hansen, President & CEO**

Elissa Hansen leads Northspan with more than 20 years of experience in business, community, organizational, and economic development across Minnesota and Wisconsin. She invests her time creatively advancing others' capabilities through strategic & business planning, facilitation, grant management & writing, financial solutions & packaging, site selection & due diligence, community project funding development, and communications & brand development.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/elissahansen/>

#### *Relevant Credentials, Experience, and Expertise:*

- Strategic planning facilitation as an individual lead or with teams for a variety of communities, private businesses, and organizations including but not limited to the East Range Joint Powers Communities, Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation, Aitkin Area Chamber of Commerce, City of Duluth, Zeitgeist Center for Arts & Community, Lake Superior Ice Festival, Statewide Health Improvement Program, Minnesota Power Regional Development & Community Relations, NORTHFORCE, North Point Geographic Solutions, Buzz Frenzy, and Lake Superior Consulting. Each of these projects included teams of people with multiple and competing perspectives on the situation they were currently in and worked toward a common vision.
- Knight Foundation's Intensive Study Tour & Training in Copenhagen, Denmark included a curated week of engaging lectures, planning workshops, and approaches to transform cities into places where public life can thrive.
- Master Class with Gehl Architects on public life studies and engagement strategies focused on people-first design, master planning, and urban development frameworks.
- Certified Economic Development Finance Professional with coursework in business credit analysis, real estate finance, and the art of deal-structuring with recertification courses in loan packaging, negotiating and problem-solving, as well as developing and financing affordable for sale housing.
- Served as a Duluth City Councilor, Council President, and Council Finance Committee Chair between 2016 – 2018. In this role Elissa's abilities and knowledge around inclusion, equity, and diversity grew exponentially. She was challenged at every meeting to create a welcoming and comfortable place for all residents and set a precedent for civil behavior. In this time, she worked with the community and councilors to update the City's Tools of Civility which now states "The Duluth City Council promotes the use and adherence of the tools of civility in conducting the business of the council. The tools of civility provide increased opportunities for civil discourse leading to positive resolutions for the issues that face our city. We know that when we have civility, we get civic engagement, and because we can't make each other civil and we can only work on ourselves, we state that today I will: pay attention, listen, be inclusive, not gossip, show respect, seek common ground, repair damaged relationships, use constructive language, and take responsibility."

Elissa has been directly involved in community engagement processes in numerous rural communities across northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin. These tight-knit communities often have passionate and dedicated community advocates, but need assistance in recognizing their assets, gathering their ideas into a coherent plan, and following through on ideas to create genuine change in the community. So much of this work includes the ability to successfully create space for these

## ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

communities to look at their future and aid them in making connections to resources that will get them moving in that direction.

In Aitkin, Elissa facilitated a community group through a full day strategic planning session bringing together members of partnering and opposing groups within the community. This session was designed to develop an Aitkin Area Chamber of Commerce Strategic Plan that all groups could get behind. Establishing stronger working relationships and a better understanding of the local business needs was a top objective. The plan was action oriented which led to community buy in and participation as well as the creation of a BR&E program and began to lead Aitkin forward through a necessary evolution in the community. A similar approach was taken with the Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation Strategic Plan and the East Range Joint Powers Board Strategic Action Plan.

### **Karl Schuettler, Director, Research & Marketing**

Karl Schuettler manages regional economic development partnerships, provides support services to local communities, and researches and analyzes economic trends for Northspan's clients. He joined Northspan in September 2016, and has previous experience in local economic development, organizational planning and analysis, public relations, and freelance journalism. A Duluth native, he holds a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University and a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Minnesota.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/karl-schuettler-30336368/>

### *Relevant Credentials, Experience, and Expertise:*

- Completed Northspan's study on drivers of housing costs and policy solutions completed in 2018, *Housing for the Next Generation of Duluth's Workforce: A Comparative Study of Single-Family Housing Construction Costs in Duluth*. The study included a list of recommendations to enhance housing affordability in Duluth, including multiple policies and programs.
- Multiple market research projects in Duluth, including vacancy rate calculations for the Greater Downtown Council and assessments of the downtown Duluth apartment and office space rental markets for private developers.
- Manages the Northland Connection program, including regular activity maintaining the program's database of commercial sites and buildings in Duluth, provision of data and property information to city staff, and participate in meetings as invited by Duluth Business Development partners.
- Involved in discussion and work surrounding the Opportunity Zones program since its inception, including discussion of designations of zones in Duluth, panel participation in discussions of the program, and Northspan's lead in the build-out phase of the Duluth LISC project portal.
- Business Retention and Expansion visits through contact with all businesses with a physical address in the City of Silver Bay in a process the led to policy recommendations and ongoing community meetings, spring 2018
- Support for community engagement processes and feasibility studies led by other Northspan staff, including work in Hermantown, Itasca County, East Range communities, International Falls, and with several regional partnerships including the Laurentian Vision Partnership, Arrowhead Growth Alliance, and NORTHFORCE
- Internal policy and procedure writing through stakeholder focus groups, Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department, 2015-2016

## **ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

- Active role in several regional economic development efforts that include dozens of member communities and organizations and require stakeholder input, including directing the Northland Connection program and membership on the board of the Iron Range Economic Alliance
- Undergraduate degree in Regional and Comparative Studies from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, with coursework in diplomacy, conflict negotiation, and research methods. Coursework included community engagement work with the District of Columbia Public Schools.
- Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, with coursework in public participation process planning, demographic analysis, and community research methods. Completed a capstone project on housing prices along transit lines for a community land trust.

### **Amanda Vuicich, Operations Manager**

Amanda Vuicich joined the Northspan team in August 2018 and currently serves as the firm's Operations Manager. She holds a bachelor's degree in International Studies from the University of Minnesota Duluth. Amanda also serves as a member of the FUSE Duluth Social Media Committee.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/amanda-vuicich-6b6539166/>

### *Relevant Credentials, Experience, and Expertise:*

- Manages all client fiscal agent needs, including invoicing and accounts receivable, as well as communication with state and federal agencies, as needed.
- Coordinates logistics and administration of event planning for clients, such as Minnesota Power Community Advisory Panels, Laurentian Vision Project, and Arrowhead Growth Alliance.
- Member of NORTHFORCE team: managing budget, invoicing funding partners, handling accounts receivable and accounts payable, social media posts, and working with consultants on job post administration.
- Managing real estate listings and business resource data for Northland Connection.

### **NORTHSPAN'S PROCESS AND CAPACITY**

Northspan and its staff have long track records of successful engagement at a community level to develop stakeholder-informed plans in communities across northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin. While these processes have been diverse, they all included the following elements:

- Conducting a wide range of stakeholder interviews on perceptions of the community, as directed by city or county staff
- Analyzing collected data for themes and reporting back to community and stakeholders on findings
- Providing programmatic and policy recommendations that result in ongoing community meetings to discuss relevant topics and address issues

Over 33 years of community development work and meeting facilitation, Northspan has built a reputation as a reliable partner that will create a careful strategy specific to the context of each engagement process. While the faces of staff members may change, the organization maintains a commitment to neutral, objective facilitation processes that are free of politics or special interests. We are well-rooted in northeast Minnesota and build long-term partnerships with communities and organizations.

## **ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

Trust is fundamental to our work, and we maintain a high standard of professionalism to continue the legacy we have built. We believe in doing direct outreach in communities instead of waiting for community members to come to us. We identify where community members are and go directly to them, building bridges founded on common interests and goals. We are also well-connected with the communities in which we operate, with ties to bodies of state and local government, private companies, philanthropic organizations, nonprofits, and community leaders. Only with buy-in from a dense network of people and groups can community engagement processes be successful, and we aspire to this comprehensive level of connection in every engagement process.

With a five-person staff, Northspan has the capacity to provide additional research work and administrative support, streamlining our internal processes and allowing us to conduct certain supporting tasks at a lower hourly rate than that of the facilitator. Recent hires have left Northspan even better-positioned to provide community development and outreach work, as Elissa Hansen and Karl Schuettler both bring strong backgrounds in this area through past work in the field, service in public office, and in their education. Our track record of professionalism, responsiveness, and fresh energy allows us to move quickly and leave clients satisfied with the support they receive.

### **NORTHSPAN'S BUSINESS, COMMUNITY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY**

#### **Engagement with diverse participants and viewpoints**

Northspan's direct clients include businesses across Minnesota and northern Wisconsin, nonprofits with a wide range of missions and clients, and units of government that represent communities currently totaling over 500,000 residents. Our work directly supports their missions and growth, and we often operate behind the scenes to add value for and increase the capacity of organizations that provide essential goods and services to people from all walks of life. Northspan also looks to build economic opportunity and engages with partners such as the Fond du Lac Tribe of Lake Superior Chippewa to ensure people from all backgrounds can participate in future economic prosperity. Our community engagement and facilitation processes emphasize efforts to bring all parties to the table and advance equity in community conversations.

We research and learn to negotiate internal politics within the communities we serve, at times doing extensive background reading on communities' histories and tapping everyone in our networks to learn what we can about the places we work. Our diligence and knowledge of history allows us to research and break down historical divides, building connections where none had existed before. Our public and private sector experience leaves us very familiar in negotiating tough crowds and tougher conversations around organizational and community change.

We purposefully and proactively seek out those who traditionally are not at the table or invited to the table. We believe in an expansive idea of diversity that works across age groups, race, faith, gender, and sexual orientation. Elissa Hansen's work with emerging leaders and entrepreneurs has crossed and bridged many divides that our communities experience.

#### **Demonstrated curiosity, respect, and understanding of clients' missions**

As an organization built on collaborative work across northeast Minnesota, northwest Wisconsin, and beyond, Northspan has a holistic vision of community and economic development and understands how partners can work together to best serve their communities. We know how to navigate a broader community and economic development ecosystem and can help your organization find its niche among its partners to ensure it is not replicating services and providing a distinctive value proposition. In our work, we have provided staffing support to local units of government, including multi-county economic

## **ISD 709 FACILITATED CONVERSATIONS: COMMUNITY PRIORITY SETTING AND ATTENDANCE AREAS REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

development partnerships such as GPS 45:93 in East Central Minnesota, multi-municipality collaborative organizations such as the East Range Joint Powers Board, and individual communities such as Sandstone and Silver Bay. We understand the needs of communities that lack enough full-time community or economic development staff and can incorporate an effort to build your capacity to serve into a strategic plan.

### **Ability to adapt and evolve as needed in service of the client**

Above all, Northspan's approach emphasizes neutrality and objectivity on behalf of the facilitator which allows us to adapt and evolve as needed. We believe it is the facilitator's role to carefully listen to all perspectives, and to encourage and proactively seek participation from everyone in the room. We also believe it is essential to not only recognize people who show up to community meetings, but also explore methods to encourage participation from groups who are conspicuous in their absence. Our flexible approach to facilitation adapts to client needs, meeting attendees, and new developments over the course of a meeting. When possible, we seek to include non-traditional engagement methods that include the arts and active engagement, which we believe can reach communities in new ways and bring them on board behind a renewed vision of their communities' future. These processes provide an essential foundation for enhanced public life, create strong places that people can call home, and foster economic growth.

Northspan's work is also based on human-centered design in that we learn from the people we are working with by immersing ourselves in their communities or organizations to understand their challenges and opportunities. We make sense of what we learn, identify opportunities for change or movement, and consider how to model or pilot these ideas. Then, together with the community, we bring these ideas to life. This approach works well because it keeps the community and its people central to the process.

Creating communities for people requires the people in the community to be the launching point. How they behave, engage, act, move, think, and work within their communities matters to the outcome. As we observe and analyze communities, gather new data, and use existing data, we begin to understand the reality on the ground. We work with communities and organizations through the process and build partnerships and collaborations to allow for trust. This has the power to change perspectives and perceptions, inviting broader, long-range thinking and creating opportunities to test new ideas and gather more input, all while engaging all types of people in the community. When we take the time to listen, observe, and engage, we can make the best possible recommendations for growth, recovery, and change.