



## **Request for Proposals: Poetry Mentors**

*Voices Forward Youth Poetry Program*  
Minnesota Humanities Center

RFP Issue Date: April 21, 2026

**Proposals Due: May 8, 2026**

**Decisions by: May 15, 2026**

**Start Date: May 26, 2026**

Submit to: [submissions@mnhum.org](mailto:submissions@mnhum.org)

MHC invites proposals from working Minnesota poets, individuals, or organizations currently mentoring youth in the arts to serve as Poetry Mentors for *Voices Forward*, a youth poetry and public humanities initiative commemorating the Semiquincentennial.



## I. Introduction and Project Overview

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The Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC), a non-profit organization, strives to create a more just society that is curious, connected, and compassionate by increasing the collective understanding of ourselves, our communities, and our histories through stories and experiences. We exist to serve Minnesotans and communities across the state. MHC serves as the state's official affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

MHC reserves the right to withdraw this RFP, reject any or all proposals submitted, or cancel this RFP process at any time. All material submitted to MHC in response to this RFP will be treated as confidential information and a copy will be retained consistent with the terms of MHC's document retention process. Submission of a proposal constitutes acknowledgment of and agreement with these terms.

### a. Background

Throughout 2026, MHC will engage communities across the state and explore how remembrance, democracy, and identity intersect locally and nationally to celebrate America's Semiquincentennial, or 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*Voices Forward* is part of [By the People: Conversations Beyond 250](#), a series of community-driven programs created by humanities councils across the United States, its territories, and the District of Columbia in collaboration with local partners. These programs explore 250 years of the nation's cultural life and imagine its shared future.

*Voices Forward* invites emerging youth poets, ages 13–19, from across Minnesota to explore the Smithsonian Folklife Festival's 2026 themes: Remembering Together, Harmonizing Together, Moving Together, and Building Together. Through mentorship and workshops, youth poets will craft poems that remember our past, mark our present, and imagine a shared future. The program asks youth poets to grapple with questions such as:

- What moments from our past define who we are and point to a shared future?
- How does commemoration help us understand our present and provide a foundation for a community's ongoing vitality?

Throughout the summer of 2026, poets will also showcase their original works in public at gatherings that will be a key part of MHC's commemoration of the Semiquincentennial.

### b. Project

MHC seeks four working Minnesota poets, individuals or organizations currently mentoring youth in the arts to serve as mentors for a cohort of up to fifteen aspiring youth poets (13–19), facilitate four larger public poetry seminars (one session per mentor, virtually or in person), and to participate in other poetry engagement activities throughout the summer,



including a capstone performance.<sup>1</sup> A core cohort of 15 youth poets has been identified through applications to the Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate program. All of these applicants will be invited to participate in the *Voices Forward* Program centered around small group or individual mentorship, growth as a poet, and the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our nation.

Workshop topics should be grounded in each mentor's own practice and oriented around the overarching Smithsonian Folklife Festival themes of [By the People: Conversations Beyond](#). Mentors may also draw on the [250<sup>th</sup> themes developed by the American Association of State and Local Histories](#) or any other related themes of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States. Final workshop concepts will be developed collaboratively as a group and approved by MHC.

## 2. Scope of Work

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MHC seeks four Poetry Mentors to work in tandem throughout the program. This role involves:

- Program design finalization and evaluation
- Individualized and small group mentorship
- Public workshop facilitation
- Event participation

Mentor Responsibilities:

- Participation in at least one virtual group planning meeting to determine big picture themes, ensure the workshops are thematically coherent, distinct from one another, and collectively cover a meaningful range of poetic forms, techniques, or approaches, and will discuss most inclusive practices for youth mentorship.
- Be paired with a small group of up to five youth poets (ages 13–19) for small group and/or individualized mentorship over the course of the summer program.
- Provide regular one-on-one and small-group feedback on original poems developed in response to the program's themes around remembrance, democracy, and shared identity.
- Create mentoring sessions that are participatory so youth poets can write, receive feedback, and engage in peer workshoping during each session.
- Support youth poets in developing work suitable for public performance and potential inclusion in a printed chapbook or broadside.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that if an organization is interested in applying, they must commit to having only one staff member assigned to the project until the project is completed to ensure consistency for the youth mentees.



- Foster a supportive learning environment for your small group so they can create and present their poems in the four public workshop and capstone event. Mentors will be expected to communicate with other Mentors to ensure that they can effectively support their small group. Mentors will be expected to attend the public showcase.
- Design and lead one of the four program public workshops, open to the core cohort of 15 youth poets in the program and up to 15 additional youth in a region or community (as determined by MHC) to create additional access for youth across the state. These may be offered in person or online.
- Participate in the public showcase at the Bell Museum (Saint Paul) in mid-to-late August 2026, featuring performances by youth poets, mentors, and any other relevant programming.
- Provide program evaluation

#### Documentation Requirements:

- Mentors will contribute to the development of curriculum materials and writing prompts for K–12 educators, to be distributed through MHC as a resources related to the 250<sup>th</sup>. These materials (including writing prompts, guides for workshops, or other creative material) are intended to amply access to poetry as a means of civic engagement in the classroom across the state. These materials may also make use of any or take inspiration from the collateral created by the young poets (chapbooks, recorded readings, etc.) to bring youth voices into the classroom.
- Mentors will be available for archival photography, video, or interview as part of program documentation (short documentary, podcast, or audio/video interviews).
- Mentors must be comfortable with their image and likeness being used in promotion of the program; media release forms will be included in participation
- Because this program is presented as a part of the Smithsonian’s *By the People* program, additional media release forms for the Smithsonian will be included. All participants must consent to their work being entered into archives of the Smithsonian Institution under their Shared Stewardship policy.
- All selected Mentors will serve as independent contractors and not employees or agents of MHC. All selected Mentors will sign a contract with MHC before commencing work.

### 3. Program Timeline

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**April 21, 2026:** Poetry Mentor RFP Posted

**May 8, 2026:** Poetry Mentor RFP Closes

**May 15, 2026:** Poetry Mentor Offers Made.

**Week of May 18, 2026:** Poetry contracts executed; onboarding with MHC.



**Week of May 25, 2026:** Mentor cohort planning meeting (virtual or in-person) to collaboratively develop and align workshop themes

**Early June, 2026:** Workshop 1 (virtual kickoff likely due to school schedules, but negotiable).

**June 2026:** Workshop 2 (in-person and/or virtual)

**July 2026:** Workshop 3 (in-person and/or virtual)

**August 2026:** Workshop 4 (in-person and/or virtual)

**Mid–Late August 2026:** Public showcase at Bell Museum

**September–October 2026:** Program evaluation and grant reporting

Proposal deadline and notification date are listed on the cover page of this RFP.

#### 4. Mentor Qualifications

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We are seeking candidates who bring a strong commitment to both poetry and youth development. Ideal candidates will demonstrate:

- Published, recorded, or officially recognized poetry or other form of humanities writing.
- Knowledgeable of multiple forms of poetry.
- Experience teaching and working with youth or young adults in education or community settings. Workshop facilitation experience is preferred.
- Experience, familiarity with, or interest in themes of memory, identity, history, and storytelling.
- Experience, familiarity with, or interests in themes of civic life, democracy, American life, and American experience.
- Commitment to providing support for students from all communities within Minnesota.
- Ability to maintain a healthy working and teaching environment.
- Availability to support youth poets and participate in virtual and in-person programming from May–October 2026.

This opportunity is open to Minnesota-based artists and mentors. Selected mentors will be required to complete a background check prior to working with youth.

#### 5. Compensation

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Each **Poetry Mentor** will receive a stipend of \$3,500 upon properly completing the work identified within the Scope of Work section of the RFP and the terms of the contract executed with MHC. MHC will provide reimbursement for reasonable mileage and out-of-



town travel expenses related to work identified within the Scope of Work. Execution of a W-9 form and ACH paperwork will be required prior to payment by MHC.

## 6. Proposal Submission Requirements

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Interested candidates should submit the following materials in a single PDF or Word document:

**Cover letter or statement of interest (1 page maximum):** Describe your interest in Voices Forward, your connection to the program's themes, and how your practice would contribute to this cohort of youth poets.

**Portfolio (3–5 pieces):** Please include original work that reflects your voice and range. At least one piece that engages themes of memory, history, place, or community is encouraged.

**Workshop concept (1 page maximum):** Briefly describe a workshop you could envision leading, including the poetic form, technique, or theme you might focus on and how it connects to the Voices Forward themes.<sup>2</sup> You may also use this space to reflect on any thoughts about program structure and mentorship approach. You may also share any details about your mentoring strategy, past mentoring successes, and any experiences working with students from diverse backgrounds

**Resume or CV:** Highlight relevant experience related to the activities, goals, and work identified within the RFP

All submissions to this RFP must be submitted electronically to MHC by 6:00 p.m. on May 8, 2026, at [submissions@mnhumn.org](mailto:submissions@mnhumn.org). Any submission submitted after the above timeframe will be treated as untimely and will not be considered by MHC.

## 7. Evaluation Criteria

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Mentors must reside in Minnesota. Proposals will be reviewed by MHC staff and evaluated on the following criteria:

- Strength and distinctiveness of voice and portfolio
- Mentor qualifications demonstrate experience working with youth, in educational settings, or in community-based contexts
- Quality and relevance of the proposed workshop concept
- Commitment to providing support for students from all communities within Minnesota.
- Availability and capacity to fulfill the full scope of work

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<sup>2</sup> The final workshop topics will be developed collaboratively with the full mentor cohort after selection—this proposal is intended to give us a sense of your areas of interest and expertise.



MHC is committed to assembling a cohort of mentors that reflects the breadth and diversity of Minnesota's communities. We strongly encourage applications from those whose work engages with underrepresented histories and voices.

## **8. Questions and Contact**

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Questions regarding this RFP may be directed to:

Rachel Busse-Aswar, Program Director, Minnesota Humanities Center, [rachel@mnhum.org](mailto:rachel@mnhum.org)

MHC will respond to all questions submitted by candidates in writing before April 24. MHC will attempt to respond to all questions within two business days of receipt of the question. MHC will post on MHC's website its responses to the questions submitted by candidates during the week of April 27.