THE HAVEN PROJECT

Request for Proposals

Strategic Planning Consultant or Team

RFP issued	October 19, 2026
Questions due	October 30, 2026
Proposals due	November 13, 2026
Finalist interviews	December 1–8, 2026
Selection announced	December 11, 2026
Final strategic plan	No later than June 2027
Final Board presentation	August 12, 2027

Anticipated consulting budget: $15,000–$25,000

Young-adult participant stipends and participation supports will be funded separately by The Haven Project.

1. Invitation and Project Overview

The Haven Project invites proposals from an experienced independent consultant, consultant team, or firm to lead a participatory strategic planning process beginning in January or February 2027 and concluding no later than June 2027. The engagement will result in a five-year strategic plan, supported by a practical three-year roadmap and specific first-year priorities. The Haven Project is also open to consultant recommendations for alternative timelines or structures that would achieve the same goals..

This process is intended to help Haven define the needs it is best positioned to address and determine the organization's role in meeting those needs over the next five years. The consultant should help Haven bring together current research, community need, stakeholder perspectives, organizational experience, and practical considerations to make clear strategic choices, clarify what makes Haven distinctive, and strengthen its case for investment and long-term organizational sustainability. Haven is looking for a consultant who can challenge assumptions, encourage candid discussion, and support bold thinking without arriving with predetermined answers.

2. About The Haven Project

The Haven Project is a Lynn-based nonprofit serving young adults, ages 17–24, who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability across Lynn and the North Shore. Haven works to equip and empower young adults to move from crisis toward safety, stability, and self-sufficiency.

Haven currently organizes its work across six focus areas: Basic Needs, Employment, Housing, Education, Health, and Community Engagement. Its broader service model includes a Drop-In Center, service coordination, workforce development and social enterprise, and housing-related services.

Haven is not a housing organization. Housing is one important part of a broader youth-homelessness response that recognizes that stability depends on more than a place to live. The strategic planning process should help Haven clarify how its programs, services, focus areas, partnerships, and public role fit together as one coherent model. Additional information about Haven's history, programs, services, and current work is available at www.havenproject.net.

3. Strategic Questions

The planning process should help Haven work through the following broad questions. Applicants are encouraged to propose the process they believe will best support these decisions rather than treating the questions as a required sequence of activities.

Mission, identity, and who Haven serves

- Who is Haven best positioned to serve, what should define the boundaries of the mission, and how should Haven describe its identity and future direction? This should include review of mission and vision language, the use of people-first language, whether terms such as "imminently homeless" clearly define who Haven is best positioned to serve, the role of "End Youth Homelessness" as a simple expression of Haven's vision, and what makes Haven distinctive within the youth-homelessness field.

Organizational model and focus areas

- How should Haven's overall organizational model evolve, including whether the six focus areas should be retained, renamed, redefined, expanded, consolidated, or otherwise changed? This should include how workforce development and social enterprise, housing-related services, and other parts of Haven's work fit within the broader model, and how Haven should prepare over the life of the plan for the long-term transition of Catalyst Housing ownership and the operational and financial responsibilities that will come with it.

Street homelessness and emergency beds

- How should Haven respond to the identified need for emergency beds for young adults experiencing street homelessness, including the appropriate model, partnerships, positioning, and role of Haven; how

that response fits within Haven's broader continuum of services; and how Haven should plan if the need grows beyond the capacity initially created? A youth-specific shelter is one potential model, but the process should not assume that a traditional shelter model is the only response.

Lynn, the North Shore, and access to services

- How should Haven deliver its work across Lynn and the North Shore, with Lynn remaining its primary hub, including the appropriate role of outreach, partnerships, facilities, and a physical or periodic presence in other communities?

Positioning, influence, and long-term sustainability

- How should Haven position itself for greater impact and long-term sustainability, including what makes the organization distinctive, how it strengthens its case for investment, and what role it should play in advocacy, public education, training, systems change, or sharing its model and expertise across Massachusetts and potentially beyond?
- Across these questions, the process should help Haven determine where it is best positioned to lead, where partnership is the stronger approach, and where another organization may be better positioned to respond. The process should help Haven make real strategic choices rather than simply validate existing work, including where greater focus, change, or different approaches may be needed.

4. Approach and Scope

Applicants should propose the planning approach they believe is best suited to Haven's goals, budget, timeline, and community. Haven is open to established tools such as SWOT analysis and SMART goals where they are useful, as well as other strategic planning methodologies. We are not prescribing a specific framework, interview count, retreat format, or steering committee model.

- The process should be informed by current and relevant research, data, and trends related to youth and young-adult homelessness and housing instability at the local, North Shore/regional, Massachusetts, and national levels. Haven expects this to be a collaborative effort and may contribute research completed by staff, students, university partners, or others. The consultant should help identify important gaps and incorporate the available evidence into the strategic planning process. A comprehensive standalone landscape or needs assessment is not part of this engagement. Relevant practices or models from outside Massachusetts may also inform the process where useful.
- The process should meaningfully involve young adults with lived experience, Haven staff and Board members, and key external stakeholders. Applicants should recommend additional stakeholders or perspectives they believe would strengthen the planning process and the engagement methods they believe will produce the most useful input. Youth participation should be meaningful, respectful, accessible, confidential, and appropriately compensated; Haven will fund participant stipends and participation supports separately from the consulting budget. Haven strongly values meaningful in-person engagement, particularly in Lynn, while recognizing that virtual or hybrid approaches may also be appropriate.
- Data and outcomes should be an important part of the planning process. The consultant should consider how Haven uses data and outcomes to understand its impact, guide decisions, and communicate results, and identify any high-level priorities that should be strengthened over the life of the plan. Detailed redesign of Haven's data systems is outside the scope of this engagement.
- The consultant should help Haven move from information and discussion to clear strategic choices, including what should receive greater emphasis, what should remain steady or change, and what would require additional funding, expertise, space, partnerships, or other capacity.

5. Required Deliverables

Deliverable	Minimum expectation
Five-Year Strategic Plan with Three-Year Roadmap	A clear strategic direction for the next five years, with a practical three-year roadmap and specific first-year priorities. Funding, resource, and long-term sustainability

Deliverable	Minimum expectation
	implications should be integrated into the strategy rather than treated as a separate plan.
Organizational Model and Strategic Direction	A reaffirmed or revised mission, vision, and organizational values, as appropriate, aligned with Haven's strategic direction. A clear description of Haven's role, who it is best positioned to serve, what makes the organization distinctive, how its work fits together, and how the six focus areas should evolve, including the place of workforce/social enterprise, housing-related services, and preparation for the long-term transition of Catalyst Housing ownership.
Logic Model / Theory of Change and Key Outcomes	A simple organization-wide model connecting needs, Haven's work, and intended outcomes, with a small set of meaningful organization-wide measures informed by current research and established practice.
One-Page External Strategic Overview	Clear, concise content Haven can use with donors, funders, partners, and the broader community to communicate its direction, intended impact, priorities, and approach to long-term sustainability. Professional graphic design is not required, although applicants may propose it within the project budget.
Final Board Presentation Materials	Clear presentation materials for one final presentation of the completed plan to Haven's Board on August 12, 2027, including time to answer Board questions.

6. Budget

The anticipated consulting budget is $15,000–$25,000. Young-adult participant stipends and reasonable participation supports will be funded separately by The Haven Project and should not reduce the amount available for consulting services.

Applicants should clearly state the proposed fee, what is included, any major assumptions, and anticipated travel or other expenses. Additional budget-detail requirements, if any, may be addressed during finalist discussions or contracting.

7. Consultant Qualifications

Haven welcomes proposals from qualified independent consultants, consultant teams, or firms. The strongest candidates will demonstrate:

- Successful nonprofit strategic planning and facilitation experience with organizations of similar size or complexity, including helping organizations make meaningful strategic choices and translating them into a concise, practical plan.
- Required Massachusetts experience working with nonprofit, human-services, homelessness, housing-instability, or related systems, along with strong familiarity with Lynn's community, service-provider, public-sector, philanthropic, housing, and civic landscape and an understanding of Salem and the broader North Shore.
- Meaningful experience with youth homelessness, housing instability, or a closely related youth or human-services field, allowing the consultant to begin with a strong understanding of the work rather than requiring extensive orientation to the basics.
- Strong facilitation, listening, research, synthesis, and written communication skills, including the ability to meaningfully engage young adults with lived experience and integrate their perspectives with research, organizational knowledge, community input, and practical realities.
- Ability to connect strategic direction with organizational identity, sustainability, resource needs, fundraising and development, and a clear case for why others should invest in Haven's mission.

8. Proposal Requirements

Proposals should be concise and generally 3–5 pages, excluding resumes or bios, references, detailed budget information if needed, and optional work samples. Haven is interested in fit, judgment, and approach rather than lengthy responses that restate the RFP. Applicants do not need to address each strategic question individually.

1. Why you or your team are particularly well suited to lead this strategic planning process for The Haven Project, including relevant experience and the person or people who would actually perform the work.
2. Your recommended approach to the engagement, including how you would use available research and stakeholder input, engage young adults with lived experience, and help Haven work through meaningful strategic choices. Haven is intentionally not prescribing the detailed process.
3. A high-level timeline showing completion of the final strategic plan no later than June 2027.
4. Proposed fee and major assumptions, including any anticipated travel or other expenses.
5. Two recent references from comparable nonprofit strategic planning engagements.
6. Optional: one sample strategic plan or comparable deliverable that demonstrates concise, practical strategic work.

9. Evaluation and Selection

Proposals will be evaluated based on fit with Haven; the quality, feasibility, and clarity of the proposed approach; relevant strategic planning and facilitation experience; Massachusetts and Lynn/North Shore knowledge; understanding of youth homelessness or closely related systems; ability to engage stakeholders and young adults with lived experience; ability to connect strategy with sustainability and fundraising; and overall value. Haven expects to interview finalists to assess alignment, facilitation style, listening skills, judgment, and fit. Finalist interviews will be conversational; no separate unpaid presentation assignment is anticipated.

10. Submission Instructions

Submit one electronic PDF proposal with the subject line “Strategic Planning RFP Response” no later than November 13, 2026 to:

Gregg Ellenberg, Executive Director
The Haven Project
gregg@havenproject.net

Questions must be submitted in writing to the same contact by October 30, 2026. Haven will respond to questions as they are received. Responses that may affect proposal preparation will be shared with all known applicants.

11. Terms and Conditions

- Costs incurred in preparing a proposal or participating in an interview are the applicant’s responsibility. Selection does not create a contractual obligation until a written agreement is fully executed.
- The selected consultant will be expected to maintain the confidentiality of organizational and participant information and comply with applicable privacy and safeguarding requirements.
- The Haven Project is an equal-opportunity organization and welcomes proposals from consultants and firms reflecting the diversity of the communities it serves.
- The Haven Project reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, request clarification, negotiate scope or price, modify the solicitation, or cancel the process.