
Position: AI Technical Assistance Consultant

Northland Small Business Development Center

Primary Location: 7 Counties of Northeast Minnesota (Remote/Video Conference/In-Person based on availability)

Hours: Part-Time Contractor

Contract Term: October 1, 2026 – December 31, 2027 (approximately 15 months)

The Northland Small Business Development Center is seeking to contract with a consultant to lead a new AI-focused technical assistance initiative for small businesses across our seven-county service region. The consultant will provide direct one-on-one and group technical assistance to help entrepreneurs and small business owners understand, evaluate, and responsibly adopt AI tools in their operations.

This is an opportunity for someone passionate about helping businesses across our region adapt and grow. Northeast Minnesota's small business community is diverse and resilient, and we're looking for a consultant who shares our commitment to helping entrepreneurs succeed, especially as AI reshapes how small businesses operate and compete.

Organizational Goals for This Initiative

- Expand access to practical, hands-on AI technical assistance for small businesses throughout the region, regardless of location or technical starting point.
- Build small business owners' confidence and competence in evaluating and safely adopting AI tools appropriate to their size and industry.
- Move beyond general AI awareness toward implemented workflow improvements that save time or create measurable value for the businesses served.
- Capture and document outcomes and impact to inform future programming.
- Build the capacity of the Northland SBDC consultant team through internal AI education.

Anticipated Scope of Work

- One-on-one technical assistance for entrepreneurs and small business owners, ranging from foundational AI orientation to higher-level, AI-augmented workflow analysis and implementation support.
- Entry-level group trainings for small business teams, including assistance developing an organizational AI policy appropriate to their business.
- One to two public webinars or in-person trainings per month.
- Collaborate with the SBDC Regional Director to develop and refine an AI technical assistance strategy throughout the project.

- Documentation of consulting activities, outcomes, and impact in our customer relationship management software (Neoserra), consistent with MN SBDC Network requirements.
- Development of, and training on, recommended AI-enhanced consulting workflows for the SBDC consultant team.

This scope is subject to change based on regional demand and client needs throughout the contract period, in consultation with the Regional Director.

Preferred Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience consulting with small businesses, entrepreneurs, or nonprofit organizations.
- Direct, hands-on experience using AI tools in a professional or consulting capacity, ideally including experience teaching or training others in their use.
- Experience designing and delivering training or curriculum for adult learners across a range of technical comfort levels.
- Experience providing one-on-one coaching or consulting support.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills.
- Comfort working with diverse small business owners across varying industries and technical backgrounds.
- Familiarity with small business operations, economic development, or entrepreneurship preferred.

Contract and Compensation

- Estimated contract amount: \$50,000 to \$70,000.
- Maximum hourly rate: \$75.00 per hour for 2026–2027.
- Time is billed on an hourly basis, including direct client contact time and reasonable preparatory time, training curriculum development and deployment time, administrative meetings with SBDC leadership, and pre-approved professional development time.
- Proposals must include your proposed hourly rate.

Companion Opportunity

Northland SBDC is simultaneously seeking a consultant for a related, separately funded opportunity through the Northland Foundation, focused on internal AI policy, staff training, and coaching (see companion RFP). Consultants are welcome to apply for one or both opportunities. Preference will be given to candidates able to serve both roles, though Northland SBDC reserves the right to award the two opportunities separately.

How to Apply

If interested, please send the following in the body of an email to Jenny Eaton at jenny@northlandsbdc.org:

- Two to four paragraphs describing your interest in and qualifications for this work, including your experience with small business or nonprofit consulting, curriculum development, training delivery, and direct AI tool usage. Specify if you prefer to meet with clients virtually, in person (specify communities), or are open to either.
- Your proposed hourly rate for consulting services.
- Your resume, or a link to your LinkedIn profile.

Deadline to apply: September 14, 2026, at 5:00 PM.

Proposal Evaluation and Selection

Applications will be collected by Jenny Eaton and reviewed by the Northland Foundation's AI Initiative Committee. Candidates selected to interview will be notified no later than September 16, 2026. Interviews are anticipated to take place on September 16, 18, 21, and 22, 2026.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

- Interview performance, including organizational fit and approach
- AI knowledge and demonstrated practical application experience
- Small business or nonprofit consulting experience
- Policy development experience
- Group training and curriculum development experience
- One-on-one coaching experience
- Availability and regional coverage fit. Candidates from outside the region are welcome to apply; candidates based locally who can deliver training in person will receive a scoring preference.
- Candidates proposing to serve both the Northland SBDC and Northland Foundation opportunities will receive a scoring preference.

Anticipated Timeline

- Application deadline: September 14, 2026, 5:00 PM
- Interview invitations sent: no later than September 16, 2026
- Interviews: September 16, 18, 21, and 22, 2026



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202 West Superior Street, Suite 800
Duluth, Minnesota 55802

218-723-4040 • northlandfdn.org
218-740-7307 • northlandsbdc.org

- Anticipated start date: October 1, 2026
- Contract term: through December 31, 2027

The Northland Foundation is a regional foundation serving the seven-county region of northeastern Minnesota and is host of the Northland Minnesota Small Business Development Center (SBDC). The SBDC operates under the Minnesota Small Business Development Center (MN SBDC) Network. The SBDC is a program sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and sponsoring host organizations and partners. The Minnesota SBDC is part of a nationwide network of SBDC offices organized as the Association of SBDCs (ASBDC) known as America's SBDC. The primary mission of the Minnesota SBDC is to support economic development in the state by providing technical assistance (professional business consultation and education) in the start-up, successful operation, and expansion of small businesses within the state's small business community. The SBDC is funded in part through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and regional support partners. All opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the program sponsors. Programs are open to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance. Northland Foundation is an equal opportunity employer, lender, and provider.