

Request for Proposals (“RFP”)
Management and Operations of the Forest Theater

Deadline: Proposals must be received no later than 5:00 pm (Central Time) on **March 15, 2022**.

Forest Forward (“FF”) is soliciting proposals from qualified firms and organizations (“Proposer”) to enter into a management agreement for the operations of the historic Forest Theater (“Theater”). The goal of this RFP is to identify one firm or organization who will manage the Forest Theater (the “Operator”) as an active performing arts facility that is responsive to community interests, provides opportunities for community engagement, and contributes to the revitalization of the South Dallas community. The service and performance requirements are described in the Scope of Services section of this RFP.

BACKGROUND

FF is a non-profit organization that partners with the community to drive equitable development, economic mobility, and improve outcomes for children, residents, and families of the South Dallas community. South Dallas is historic neighborhood in Dallas, impacted during the 20th century by the construction of an interstate and the destruction of thousands of homes, white flight, and disinvestment from both public and private sectors. During its early years, it was predominantly a Jewish neighborhood, reshaped by redlining and segregation into the resilient African American community that it is today.

FF is at the forefront of a strategic revitalization effort centered around the historic Forest Theater. Building on the vision of community stakeholders and with multi-million private and philanthropic investment, FF’s goals are to ignite healthy neighborhood revitalization and create a new vibrant core for the city of Dallas. FF has recently completed a visionary plan to strategically position the Theater as the anchor of a multi-prong community revitalization strategy. The strategy is:

- Advanced by a private-public partnership with the Dallas Independent School District, a newly formed cradle to college art centered educational pathway
- Stabilized by the development and construction of accessible mixed-income housing.
- Catalyzed by the key investment of over \$75 million to renovate and expand the Theater’s footprint, to provide artistic creative spaces for community innovation and skill development, and to attract live concerts, plays, and visitors bringing a renewed source of vibrancy, while also centering a focus on uplifting the black experience through all creative activities.

FF’s plans for the revitalization include the renovation of the Theater (further described below), construction of the Education Center education center, and a neighborhood café. This RFP is for the management and operations of the Theater; FF current plans are to contract with other operators for the management and operations of the Education Center and the café.

To manage the multi-part complex, FF will employ an onsite General Manager, Community Engagement Officer, and Hospitality Officer to manage the overall relationship with the community and oversee maintenance and improvements to the facilities. FF will also manage an endowment to support capital maintenance and improvements and fundraise annually to support its personnel.

FOREST THEATER

The Forest Theater was built in 1949 by vaudeville and movie palace impresario Karl Hoblitzelle, who also developed the historic Majestic, Lakewood, and Inwood Theaters in Dallas, as well as theaters in several other cities in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, and Kansas through his Interstate Theaters Company. As a movie house, the Theater was a state-of-the-art one screen movie house seating nearly 1,400 guests. It operated as a movie house through the 1960s. The population changes in South Dallas caused the focus of the Theater to change its offerings to Black audiences, becoming a mecca for art, music, and community gatherings. Legendary artists such as Tina Turner, Prince, Gladys Knight, and B.B. King performed for packed crowds at the Theater. Over the years, the Theater has gone through a number of uses and closures, with several unsuccessful efforts to rejuvenate it into an operating and sustaining venue.

In 2017, the Theater was acquired and gifted by a philanthropic couple committed to equity in the arts and education. FF obtained ownership of the building and has undertaken the responsibility for the historic restoration and expansive renovation. The renovation of the more than 45,000 square foot space includes four major spaces: Main Theater (500 seats); Education Center (13,000 square feet featuring movement and recording studio, flex space, resource center, sensory immersion room, and artist classrooms and labs); café with rooftop deck, and a flexible black box theater also outfitted for film and video activities (12,313 square feet of new construction).

As part of the renovation, FF will equip the Theater with light and sound systems (equipment to remain property of FF). The renovation of the Theater is expected to be completed by early 2024. FF plans to select the Operator by Summer 2022, allowing for an 18-month pre-opening phase.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

The primary goals for the successful proposer are to ensure the sustainability, revenue generation, and community involvement in the Theater, while maintaining FF's mission focus to uplift the black experience with the overall programming activities.

FF has set the following operational priorities for the selected Operator:

- Manage the day-to-day operations of the Theater following best practices and industry standards for a performing arts facility of this size.
- Activate the space as an entertainment and cultural hub that is inspired by and reflects the Black experience. Not every activity must directly connect to this focus, but overall programming should center in this way and no activities should be in conflict with this intention.
- Manage the Theater's schedule, presenting a combination of ticketed events produced and/or promoted by the Operator, rentals, and special events.
- Coordinate rentals of the Theater by third parties, which may include other nonprofits, community organizations, and commercial promoters.
- Provide well-qualified and trained staff with expertise operating a performing arts center and managing a variety of performing, multi-disciplinary, and community events.
- Provide ticketing and accounting systems for the operations of the venue.
- Exercise the highest standard of care and maintenance to the facility, coordinating facility maintenance requests with FF as appropriate.
- Establish an annual budget for the Theater including rental rates, ticket fees, and other revenue generating opportunities.
- Provide directly or through contracted vendors concessions during events and performances.
- Coordinate with FF for the development and regular updating of the Theater website. This website may be housed or linked to the FF website and it is expected that the Operator will maintain brand cohesiveness and follow FF style guidelines.
- Plan and implement marketing and advertising activities to increase awareness of the Theater and promote participation in the performances and events booked by the operator.
- Coordinate with FF for its use of the Theater for a maximum of five (5) dates annually, which may include a Showcase event and fundraising events. For these dates, FF will not pay rent but will reimburse the Operator for out-of-pocket expenses such as labor and materials/supplies required for the events.
- Coordinate with the MLK Arts Academy and Dallas Independent School District, as well as the operator of the Education Center for educational use of the Theater for a maximum of four weeks in the Fall and four weeks in the Spring. For these dates, educational users will not pay rent but will reimburse the Operator for out-of-pocket expenses such as labor and materials/supplies required for the events.

FF has identified the following guiding principles for the use of the Theater:

- Ensure that programming is inclusive and aligned to the mission and values of FF.
- Celebrate community and provide opportunities for engaging a wide variety of audiences.

- Encourage culturally and artistically diverse programming.
- Support local artists and community organizations.
- Prioritize hiring and providing professional training opportunities for community residents for all positions at the Theater.

In keeping with the community focus, the Theater will not be available for programming that is sexually oriented; promotes racism, discrimination, supremacy, or hate; or that is contrary to FF's values. In furtherance of its community mission, FF reserves the right to veto programming that is contrary to the long-term sustainability and mission of the Theater.

The Operator may fundraise for the programs and operations of the Theater, but must do so in close coordination with FF.

In addition to the Theater, FF will be constructing a 200-seat black box theater that will be outfitted for film/video production and theatrical production. It is anticipated that this space will be used about 60 percent of the time by the Education Center, but could also be used for performing arts presentations and other events. Operators are encouraged to consider the management of this additional space in their proposal in addition to operating the main Theater.

QUALIFICATIONS

Proposers must demonstrate in their application that they meet or exceed the following qualifications:

- Experience and ability to align the operations and programs with the mission and values of FF and the Theater.
- History of financial sustainability and revenue generation
- History of presenting or promoting culturally relevant performing arts programs and events, directly or with partners.
- Ability to provide training programs to develop the talent pathway pipeline for community members.

SELECTION CRITERIA

FF will evaluate the proposals based on the following criteria:

- Proposal demonstrates the centering and prioritizing of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access processes, programming, or any related topics.
- Demonstrated experience and success managing or operating similar performing arts venues.
- Alignment of the proposed management approach with the goals and guiding principles stated in this RFP.
- Financial terms proposed, including revenue generating plan and applicant's financial sufficiency.
- Quality of references

PRE-PROPOSAL QUESTIONS

An optional tour of the facility for interested proposers is scheduled for February 15, 2022 at 10:30 a.m. Interested parties are required to RSVP for the tour by emailing information@forestforward.org no later than 5:00 p.m. on February 12, 2022. A virtual tour will also be recorded and provided on email request after the live tour is complete.

All questions must be directed to information@forestforward.org no later than 5:00 p.m. on March 8, 2022. Responses to all questions submitted will be posted online at www.forestforward.org. A site plan and other documents related to the Theater and intended renovation are also posted at the same link.

To ensure a fair and equitable review process of all proposals, we ask that interested proposers do not call or contact Forest Forward staff or board members for questions related to this RFP or to advocate for the selection of any particular firm or organization.

PROPOSAL FORMAT

Each proposal must include the following information:

1. Name of the Firm / Organization including name of the CEO / principal officer
2. Address, name, phone number and email address for the main contact person
3. Structure of the firm/organization (nonprofit, commercial, sole proprietor, etc.)
4. Years that the firm/organization has been in business operating performing arts facilities similar to the Theater
5. Financial information (a current financial statement and balance sheet)
6. Reference letters from at least three (3) references should be persons who have experience with the proposer as an operator or manager of performing arts or public assembly facilities. Letters should include title, name, and contact information for the references so that follow-up conversations are possible if required.
7. A Statement of Qualifications that summarize the proposer's experience on similar projects or properties. List the name, location, size and description of the facility, type of contract relationship with facility owner, revenue share and any other pertinent details.
8. Proposed Management and Operation Structure
 - a. Proposer's approach to managing the Theater, outlining the services that will be provided directly by the Operator and its staff or by contracted services
 - b. Types of events or programs that the Operator will produce or promote.
 - c. Staffing model with a proposed organizational chart
 - d. Start-up costs and capitalization plan, including any expected financial contribution from FF.
9. Pro-forma Operating Model that includes number and types of activities, target attendance, revenue and expense projections.
 - a. Pro-forma should include the estimated revenue share from Operator to FF (from any source, including tickets, ticket fees, parking, concessions, rentals, or other sources) or estimated payment to Operator from FF. FF expects a portion of earned revenue to be shared to support FF's responsibility for capital maintenance and improvements.
 - b. All proposals must detail what FF will be expected to provide in terms of financial contribution or expected role in building operations.
10. Supplemental materials such as brochures, programs, calendars, press coverage, and website and social media links related to other venues managed by the Operator.

GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. Proposals shall be valid for no less than 120 days from the deadline for submittals.
2. FF is open to considering all options and approaches to the management and operations of the Theater. The terms outlined in this RFP are the starting point for final negotiation with the selected Operator.
3. FF reserves the right to request additional information from proposers during the review and evaluation of the proposals.
4. The duration of the management and operations agreement is suggested to be for a five-year term with an option to renew with the consent of both parties. Other alternatives may be considered.
5. The Operator will provide quarterly reports to FF on the facility operations, including information on the number of events, attendance, revenue, and expenses.
6. Revenue sharing or operating support options shall be clearly articulated in the proposal.
7. FF retains the naming rights to the facility and all its spaces. Operator retains the right for sponsorship sales for programming or events that are produced by the Operator.
8. While the expectation is that the Theater will open in early 2024, unexpected delays related to the renovation of a historic facility may occur which will impact the starting date of the management and operations agreement.

9. FF reserves the right to amend, modify, or cancel this RFP process at any time within its sole and absolute discretion.
10. FF assumes no liability for any fees, costs or expenses incurred in connection with the preparation and/or submission of the RFP response by the applicant, or for any other fees, costs, or expenses incurred prior to the selection of an applicant.

PROPOSAL SUBMITTALS:

Interested applicants must submit a written proposal that follows the Proposal Format as outlined in this RFP.

Proposers must submit one electronic PDF copy to information@forestforward.org no later than 5:00 p.m. on March 15, 2022. Late proposals will not be considered.

Evaluation of proposals will be done in late March and early April by a committee that includes representatives of FF, as well as industry experts and community members. After reviewing the received proposals, FF may invite selected proposers to an interview, request additional information, and/or conduct site visits to a venue operated by the proposer.