

RIVERBANKS ZOO & GARDEN

Procurement Services
400 Rivermont Drive, Columbia, SC 29210
Phone: 803-602-0831 Fax: 803-771-8722

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION – FOOD & BEVERAGE/ADMISSION SERVICES

RFI NUMBER: 2025-03-01

DATE: 04/24/2025

OPENING DATE AND TIME: **May 22, 2025, 10:00 AM EST**

OPENING LOCATION: Riverbanks Zoo & Garden
Procurement Services
400 Rivermont Drive
Columbia, SC 29210

MAILING ADDRESS: Riverbanks Zoo & Garden
Attn: Noelle Kelley
400 Rivermont Drive
Columbia, SC 29210

NOTICES/INSTRUCTIONS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This request is for information only to assist Riverbanks Zoo and Garden (“Riverbanks”) in determining how best to fulfill Food & Beverage/Admission Services requirements described herein.

Please be advised that this may be a two-step process. Should Riverbanks determine to proceed with a solicitation based on the responses to this Request for Information (RFI), phase two will then be a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) to be handled in accordance with District purchasing policies and procedures.

1.2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Request for Information (RFI) is to solicit technical and performance narratives along with suggested pricing information from vendors.

1.3 BACKGROUND

Riverbanks Zoo and Garden is located in Columbia, the State capital of South Carolina. Columbia is one of the fastest growing metro areas in the southeast showing an increase in population of 19% since 1990. Approximately one million people live within a 50-mile radius of Riverbanks. Riverbanks is governed and operated as a single entity by the seven-member Riverbanks Park Commission (Commission), a Special Purpose District (SPD). SPDs are defined as a political subdivision of the State of South Carolina; however, Riverbanks is not considered a state agency. Riverbanks opened in 1974 and the Garden in 1995. Guests may enter Riverbanks through ticketing facilities located at the east and west campus entrances and then choose to walk between the two facilities or ride a motorized tram. Riverbanks attracts over one million visitors annually, making it South Carolina’s largest gated attraction. Approximately 40% of all Riverbanks’ visitors originate from 50 miles or more away from Columbia.

Riverbanks is located on the north bank of the Lower Saluda River and covers approximately 40 developed acres. The east and west campus are connected by an 800-foot-long bridge over the Saluda river. The West campus currently includes the formal gardens, splash pads and children's play areas, as well as catering facilities. New animal habitats and guest amenities are currently being designed. Riverbanks employs approximately 370 full-time and part-time employees. Riverbanks provides care for more than 3,000 exotic animals and is involved in conservation and breeding programs for numerous endangered species. Riverbanks is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is widely recognized as one of the most successful mid-sized zoos in the United States.

Riverbanks is open every day of the year except Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. The normal hours of operation are 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily. Riverbanks conducts several ticketed after-hour events.

1.4 **CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCE/SITUATION**

1.4.1 **Features**

- a) There are currently 12 concession locations, and two retail locations that are being managed by the current vendor. There are currently two separate contracts in place. One contract includes concessions, retail, and catering and the second includes admissions Ten (10) of the concession locations are located on the east campus and two (2) are located on the west campus, with an additional food and retail opportunity under construction. Seasonal carts are also utilized to sell items for both food and retail. The Catering team manages eight (8) venues and supports the Zoo by having an on-site sales team and catering team. There are three (3) main physical admission locations as well as having the ability to sell tickets online. The current vendor manages the Point of Sales system utilized for the sale of general admission tickets, memberships, event tickets, attractions tickets etc.
- b) Vendor is responsible for all applicable permits, licenses and fees pertaining to the operations of the retail and food service facilities and gives all notices and comply with federal, state and local laws, ordinances, rules and regulations related thereto.
- c) Vendor provides all labor required for operation of retail, food service facilities, sales and catering staff. This includes salaried management staff and hourly sales associates. The vendor provides all personnel with Riverbanks-logo uniforms, name tags and service training.
- d) Vendor provides all retail merchandise, food and/or products and is responsible for all expenses related to product acquisition.
- e) Vendor provides IT support, marketing support and strategic consulting on the Galaxy system used for all Point of Sales.

1.5 **RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS**

Please keep your response to 10 pages or less. As it is anticipated that firms will submit brochures and marketing information, and Riverbanks may not be able to copy such material, firms are requested to provide three (3) copies of all. RFI response should contain the following:

- **Contact Information**
 - Please provide the following contact information:
 - Company Name
 - Address
 - Name of the individual who will act as primary point of contact for inquiries

- Contact Person's Telephone Number
- Contact Person's Email Address
- Comments
 - Please provide your evaluative comments on the project description and requirements outlined in this document. Include any suggestions or advice regarding the design, implementation, management, technology, etc. of this contemplated project. Detail what additional information or clarifications would be needed in order to prepare a comprehensive proposal in the future. If any part of the work covered by this RFI is to be subcontracted, the vendor shall identify the subcontracting organization and contractual arrangements made therewith.
- Pricing Samples
 - Sample Table of Commission
 - Food and Beverage
 - Catering
 - Retail
 - Admissions
 - Sample Capital Investment over a five (5) year period
- Approach
 - Based on the project information provided to date, briefly describe the approach you would recommend for this project and why. If the vendor intends to operate through the use of subcontractors, it must provide the company name of the subcontractor.

1.6 **SUBMISSION OF INFORMATION**

Submit written responses of literature and pricing no later than _____ to:
RFI response may be submitted to:

Noelle Kelley
Procurement Manager
400 Rivermont Drive
Columbia, SC 29210

TELEPHONE: (803) 602-0831

Questions may be emailed to: Noelle Kelley, nkelley@riverbanks.org

1.7 **OUTCOME**

Riverbanks Zoo and Garden does not guarantee any formal solicitation will be generated based on this RFI.