1.0 INTRODUCTION

Established in 1916, the Chicago Urban League ("CUL") helps people find jobs and establish careers, become homeowners, enhance their educational experiences, strengthen their leadership skills, and grow their businesses. With two locations on the South Side of Chicago, CUL promotes strong, sustainable communities through advocacy, innovation, collaborative community, and corporate and civic relationships throughout the Chicagoland area.

CUL is requesting written bids from qualified firms and/or collaboratives to provide event management services. This RFP outlines the procedures and requirements set forth by CUL for the selection of one provider of the Services and seeks additional information regarding the qualifications of the Firm and/or collaborative and its individual personnel.

Technical questions or requests for clarification shall be directed in writing to the Senior Vice President of Development whose contact information is listed below. CUL's responses to a firm's question(s) will be provided only to the firm asking the question(s) and not shared with other respondents.

Cheryl Russell
SVP of Development
crussell@chiul.org

2.0 KEY DATES

RFP Made Available	1/12/2026
Informational Webinar (attendance preferred)	1/16/2026
Deadline for Proposals	2/2/2026
Interviews with Selected Respondents	2/6/2026
Provider Selected and Notified	2/20/2026
Start Date of Services	3/2/2026

CUL reserves the right to extend the submission deadline or any other deadline or date in the RFP in the event that an extension would be in the best interest of CUL.

3.0 BACKGROUND OF THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE

The Chicago Urban League (CUL) is a Chicago nonprofit public benefit corporation recognized by the IRS as a charitable, tax-exempt organization pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

CUL's mission is to foster economic empowerment, cultivate leadership, and dismantle systemic barriers in the effort to drive lasting equity and prosperity for Black Chicago. Its programs are designed to support and strengthen the Black community by helping people find jobs and establish careers, become homeowners, advance their education, strengthen their leadership skills, and grow their businesses. These objectives are managed and achieved through CUL's five key program divisions: Youth & Family Services Center; Workforce Development Center; Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation; Housing & Financial Empowerment Center; and the IMPACT Leadership Development Program. CUL also works to drive systemic change through its Research & Policy Center.

The Golden Fellowship Dinner is a critical fundraising component of CUL's philanthropic revenue stream as well as an optimal moment to achieve development priorities such as donor stewardship of current stakeholders and acquisition of new funders. With this in mind, the successful bidder will be able to craft and deftly execute a plan that will accomplish these objectives by laying the groundwork for GFD attendees to have a positive and seamless experience throughout the lifecycle of the event, from initial event registration to the last celebratory activity of the evening.

4.0 EVENT HISTORY AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

For the past 64 years, the Chicago Urban League has hosted the Golden Fellowship Dinner (GFD), its signature fundraising event that raises critical dollars needed to support its service to thousands of Chicagoland residents. As one of the premiere gala events in Chicago, a smooth gala attendee experience is paramount as it fortifies GFD's high level of repeat guests, increases the likelihood of robust on-site fundraising, and unleashes the event's potential to bring new donors and supporters into the CUL family. (

The event has consisted of 1) a VIP and champagne reception, (2) dinner program that features a Paddle Raise, (3) performance by a top artist, (4) general after party, and (5) the President & CEO's invite-only after party.

In 2025, GFD welcomed nearly 2,400 guests to the Skyline Ballroom at McCormick Place on November 8th and raised (gross) almost $3 million. The theme was "Shoulders We Stand On, Futures We Create," recognizing the contributions of many individuals – past and present – who have helped foster economic empowerment, cultivate leadership, and break down barriers on the path to equity. A highlight of the event was museum-like installations replicating the history of the Black community. Honorees included George E. Johnson Sr., Julieanna Richardson, and Toi Salter.

The 2025 GFD Gala Chair was Charles Smith, founder of CS Insurance Strategies; and Toi Salter, CEO of Salter Financial Management served as Honorary Gala Chair. A Host Committee consisting of top donors, board members, auxiliary members, and other friends of CUL also supported the event. There is also an internal CUL staff committee that works closely with the production team.

The following links provide insight into GFD 2025 such as overall event agenda and entertainment information, ticket prices, and sponsorship levels.

https://chiul.org/gfd-64-shoulders-we-stand-on-futures-we-create/

https://chiul.org/sponsor-gfd64/

The 65th Annual Golden Fellowship Dinner will take place on November 7, 2026, at the Skyline Ballroom, McCormick Place-West Building. CUL is looking for an events company and/or collaborative with expertise coordinating event logistics that include, but are not limited to:

- Vendors (i.e., florist, printing, photography, videography, graphic design)
- Managing development of event collateral such as invitations, signage, programs, talent/speaker promo cards, and wristbands
- Budget Management
- Coordinate the delivery, setup, and storage of event materials (i.e., exhibits, event collateral)
- Tear-down and removal of event equipment and décor
- Work closely with CUL Finance to settle all vendor payments
- Production of the Event from Beginning to End
- On-site support for technical malfunctions
- Use of technology to facilitate registration, event check-in and the assignment of paddle raise collateral. (At multiple locations) **The successful respondent will be able to provide a seamless solution for event registration for sponsors and individuals, bidder registration, table assignment prior to the event, and the assignment of bidder collateral prior to the event.**
- Securing Talent/Entertainment
- Securing Hotel Rooms for the Event
- Interfacing with Hotel and McCormick Place Staff

5.0 PREPARATION COSTS

CUL shall not be responsible for bid preparation costs, nor for the costs, including attorney fees associated with any administrative, judicial, or other type of challenge to the determination of the selected proposer and/or award of the contract and/or rejection of the proposal. By submitting a bid, each respondent agrees to be bound in the respect and waives all claims to such costs and fees.

6.0 CONTRACT PERIOD

CUL intends to award one contract that will begin on **March 2, 2026.**

7.0 RULES GOVERNING PROPOSALS

The content of all proposals will be kept confidential throughout the selection process and afterward. Copies of any proposal will not be shared with other respondents.

7.1 Disposition of Proposals

All materials submitted in response to the RFP shall become the property of CUL

7.2 Late Submissions

Proposals received after the dates specified will not be considered and will be returned to the respondent unopened.

7.3 Acceptance/Rejection of Submittal

CUL reserves the right to reject any or all responses to this RFP, to waive minor irregularities in any bid or in the RFP procedures, and to accept any bid presented that meets or exceeds these specifications and that is deemed to be in the best interests of CUL; however, the requirements for timelines shall not be waived.

7.4 Proposals

CUL expects respondents to submit a preliminary proposal that includes:

a. An overview of your organizational chart, areas of specialization, number of years in operation, etc.
b. Provide a minimum of two recent examples of success in large-scale event planning, which include the number of event attendees.
c. Special circumstances or capabilities that you would like CUL to know about you, your company/team. (i.e., use of technology/technical features such as QR codes to facilitate event attendee registration, pre-assignment of tables, and automatic collection of pledges)
d. Include a brief statement about any key relationships, business or personal, that you, your company/team has that you believe might bring value (sponsorships, media exposure, access or otherwise) to achieving the objectives of event.

7.5 Evaluation and Interviews

A committee of individuals representing CUL will perform the evaluation of all preliminary proposals. Following this evaluation process, the committee may elect to ask qualified respondents to complete an oral interview before the committee. The purpose of the interview is to allow those selected firms further expansion and discussion of their written responses.

Oral interviews are provided at the sole discretion of CUL and are for the purpose of allowing CUL to broaden their understanding of certain selected respondents. This will be the only opportunity for a respondent to receive feedback on their preliminary proposal.

7.6 Minimum Qualifications

All managed service providers submitting a final bid must:

- Be licensed to do business in Illinois
- Have the expertise and resources to provide event management services for large-scale, high-profile fundraising galas
- Consistently maintain and allocate sufficient staff/team resources to provide timely service
- Maintain staff/team with demonstrated knowledge of and experience with various special events mobile platforms and registration technologies such as Handbid, Cvent, OneCause, and GiveSmart.
- The Chicago Urban League is open to reviewing proposals from organizations that have formed a strategic alliance to submit one seamless proposal detailing how the required tasks within the RFP will be completed. However, there must be **one lead organization designated as the primary respondent that will be held accountable for the delivery of the services outlined in the RFP.**

7.7 Bid Guidelines

Please respond as outlined in this request and observe the following guidelines:

1. Respond to questions as directly as possible along with any supporting information you feel will be pertinent to these questions.
2. Electronic submissions must be emailed to Cheryl Russell (crussell@chiul.org) no later than 5:00 pm on **Monday, February 2nd.**
3. Our final selection will be made based on our evaluation of the criteria and skill/experience preferences outlined in Section 4 (Event History and Scope of Services – logistical coordination expertise), Section 7 of this Request for Proposal, responses to the queries in Section 8, and feedback from oral interviews.

7.8 Final Provider Selection

Interviews of select respondents will take place **Friday, February 6th**. The final selection of the successful respondent(s) is scheduled to be completed by **Friday, February 20th.** The successful respondent will assume their responsibilities on **Monday, March 2nd.** Respondents who are not selected will be notified via email by 5 p.m., **Friday, February 20th.**

8. QUESTIONS AND FIRM/COLLABORATIVE CRITERIA

8.1 General Firm/Collaborative Information & Services

Provide a brief description of your firm or collaborative, including but not limited to an overview of your firm/collaborative, including name of the principal(s) of the firm/group, addresses, total number of employees/team members, overall industry experience, certifications, and any affiliations. If responding to the RFP as a collaborative, please identify the lead organization/person.

Experience and Resources

1. Describe your firm/collaborative and its capabilities. Include in your description:
    a. Your detailed planning process.
    b. A detailed case (giving specific real-world examples) as to your firm's capacity to effectively utilize technology to advance core event functions such as registration, facilitating on-line auctions, and on-site paddle raise fundraising.
    c. How you manage potential risks and unanticipated emergencies that occur during an event. (i.e., feel free to describe how your firm addressed an on-site challenge)
    d. Describe, in detail, your staff capabilities regarding competencies in areas such as familiarity with event platform technologies, on-site crisis management, etc.
2. Describe the largest fundraising event your firm/collaborative has planned/coordinated. It is critical to include number of attendees; fundraising goal and dollars raised; "at event" fundraising revenue (paddle raise, on-site auction, etc.); key aspects of your firm's work that contributed to the event's success; integration of technology into key event functions such as check-in and registration.
3. Provide a list of references with names and contact information for organizations or businesses for whom you have performed similar work. A minimum of three references is required, references from nonprofit organizations are preferred.
4. What tools, strategies, or prioritization methods do you use to ensure that key event planning/coordination benchmarks are achieved?
5. Describe your approach to providing event management services.
6. Define standard service hours and on-site and remote support availability.
7. Describe any additional service items and costs that may be of interest to CUL.

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8.3 Fee Structure

Provide a clear fee schedule that outlines all monthly service delivery costs as well as any proposed one-time software or start-up costs. The fee schedule should include a breakdown of pricing structure (per user, per hour, etc.) and any additional billing rates, hourly costs, and additional expenses for each individual or service. Provide any other fee information applicable to the proposal that has not been covered. Outline all provisions, termination clauses, and/or penalties for closing or changing number of services as needed.

8.4 Additional Considerations

Describe any additional facets relevant to this RFP, which have not been previously mentioned that you feel warrant consideration or add to your firm's value as a strategic partner to CUL.

8.5 Responses from Collaboratives

Throughout this Request for Proposals, the use of the term Firm/Firms is used to also mean Collaborative/Collaboratives. For the purpose of this RFP, a collaborative is a group of individuals/firms who are partnering to deliver the services outlined in this RFP. Collaboratives must designate a lead person/entity and all communication regarding the proposal will be with that lead person.