

Request for Proposals for Café Vendor

Introduction

Arts @ Large is seeking a qualified café vendor to lease and operate the purpose-built café located inside its Community Center in the Walker's Point neighborhood of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Walker's Point is a thriving, historic district with a variety of restaurants, antique stores, new apartment complexes, and residential homes. The Arts @ Large Community Center is within walking distance of large and small businesses, including Leader Paper and Rockwell Automation, and is close to several elementary, middle, and high schools.

The Arts @ Large Community Center is a unique space where artists, teachers, and community members of all ages gather to explore their creative spirit, while enjoying hand-crafted coffee and food in a welcoming atmosphere.

“The Arts @ Large Café is an inviting, airy and artful addition to Walker’s Point. Operating under the roof of the Arts @ large cultural incubator, the Café is a pleasant place for breakfast and lunch with a vibe that feels more family business than institutional.” –Shepherd Express

Arts @ Large seeks a vendor to operate the café as an independent business tenant and contribute to the Community Center's overall activity and vibrancy through high-quality café service. We look forward to receiving innovative and creative proposals.

Request for Proposal

Arts @ Large invites proposals from qualified vendors to provide café services (“Services”) as outlined in this Request for Proposals (“RFP”).

The purpose of this RFP is to select a vendor to enter into a lease or license agreement with Arts @ Large to operate the café. While the details outlined regarding café operations reflect organizational preferences, final terms will be determined through negotiation and defined in the lease agreement. Additional details are provided in Appendix A.

This RFP is not a tender and is not subject to the laws of competitive bidding. No bid contract or agreement is created by submitting a proposal.

Cultural Alignment

Arts @ Large believes in Arts For All: we create equitable and inclusive environments that encourage communities to grow together through art-making and educational experiences. We value relationships, equity, and lifelong learning.

While the café operator will operate as an independent business tenant, we seek proposals that demonstrate an understanding of our values and an ability to provide a welcoming, community-oriented environment within our facility.

Submission of Proposals

1. **Proposals must be submitted by 11:59 PM CST February 28, 2026.** The deadline for receipt of proposals may be extended by Arts @ Large by way of an addendum. Vendors are solely responsible for ensuring their proposals are delivered on time.
2. Proposals must be submitted online through our application form found here: <https://tinyurl.com/44zrccuw>
3. Inquiries concerning this RFP are to be directed in writing via email to operations@artsatlargeinc.org.
4. Vendors should complete and submit all required materials outlined in Appendix B.
5. Any assumptions being made by the vendor should be clearly and prominently stated in the proposal.
6. Alternative or innovative proposals are encouraged. However, vendors submitting alternative or innovative proposals are asked to also provide a proposal in accordance with the base requirements of this RFP. The alternative/innovative proposal portion of the response should be clearly identified as such and separated from the proposal provided for the base requirements. Arts @ Large reserves the right to make an award based on any alternative/innovative proposal.

Service Contract

7. Any Services acquired under this RFP will be formalized through a mutually acceptable lease or license agreement between Arts @ Large and the selected vendor. Arts @ Large reserves the right to negotiate all terms and conditions at its sole discretion.
8. Vendor staff may be required to sign confidentiality agreements to access Arts @ Large systems or facilities.

Proposal Contents and Cost of Proposals

9. Proposals must be submitted in writing and should be in the form attached as per Appendix B. Vendors may provide additional information beyond that requested in the RFP for Arts @ Large's consideration. Any such additional information may be considered by Arts @ Large at its sole discretion.
10. Arts @ Large is not responsible for any costs incurred in preparing or submitting proposals, attending interviews, providing presentations, or otherwise engaging in the RFP process.

Anticipated Schedule of Events

11. The following is the anticipated schedule of events related to this RFP. These dates are provided as target dates only and may be changed at any time by Arts @ Large at its sole discretion:

Schedule of Events	Estimated Date
RFP Released	January 15, 2026
Vendor Proposals Due	February 28, 2026
Completion of Selection Process	April 30, 2026
Contract Signing	May 15, 2026
Commencement of Lease	June 1, 2026

Evaluation Process

12. All proposals will be kept confidential.
13. Arts @ Large reserves the right to keep evaluation details and/or vendor rankings confidential.
14. Arts @ Large may request interviews, demonstrations, or meetings with select vendors as part of the evaluation.
15. Arts @ Large reserves the right to create a shortlist of vendors who may undergo additional evaluation and/or negotiation.
16. Competitive negotiation may be part of this RFP process.
17. Reference checks may be conducted independently of references provided.
18. Arts @ Large will select the proposal that provides the best overall value and service solution for the organization. Evaluation is subjective and conducted at Arts @ Large's sole discretion. Evaluation criteria are provided in Appendix C.

Legal Framework

19. This RFP does not create a binding obligation for Arts @ Large to enter into a contract. Arts @ Large intends to conduct a flexible procurement process that is not subject to competitive-bidding laws.
20. Arts @ Large reserves the right, at its sole discretion, at any time and for any reason, to:
 - Reject any or all proposals (including, for greater certainty, the lowest cost proposal)
 - Accept a proposal in whole or in part
 - Clarify a proposal where, in the sole judgment of Arts @ Large, an error or mistake is apparent on its face
 - Accept any non-compliant proposal where the non-compliance is, in Arts @ Large's sole judgment, not material
 - Reject any non-compliant proposal
 - Accept or reject any conditional proposal
 - Accept any alternative or innovative proposal
 - Negotiate any aspect of any proposal (including price) and/or any purchase terms and conditions
 - Cancel this RFP at any time for any reason (with or without commencing a new RFP or other similar process in its place)
21. Proposals may be amended or withdrawn by written notice to Arts @ Large before a lease is executed.

Confidentiality

Vendors must keep all information provided by Arts @ Large confidential. Public announcements regarding the Services may not be made without written authorization.

APPENDIX A: Service Requirements

Background & Description of the Project

Mission and History

The mission of Arts @ Large (A@L) is to activate Milwaukee's communities to build environments that support arts-rich, lifelong learning. Our vision is that all Milwaukee residents can access the arts regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic status. We use the arts to cultivate inclusive and innovative communities where students, their families, and residents excel and grow.

Recognizing a growing need in schools without full-time arts instruction, an arts educator and an arts administrator founded A@L in 2001. A@L has since provided arts-integrated learning to Milwaukee students for over two decades. Our programs invest in local Artist Educators to facilitate diverse, arts-rich educational opportunities. We collaborate with partners and artists to make the arts available across all school curriculum areas and in after-school, summer, and community programs.

A@L has fueled Milwaukee's creative economy by investing over \$6 million in artist fees and facilitating thousands of hours of professional development. Our work has garnered recognition from national organizations, including Americans for the Arts and the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program. The *Milwaukee Business Journal*, *BizTimes*, and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* have also highlighted our programming.

The Arts @ Large Community Center was opened in July of 2019 to serve as the hub for creatives to gather, be inspired, share their voices and unique perspectives, and build engaging experiences that catalyze the betterment of our community.

The Community Center Cafe

The Arts @ Large Café serves a wide variety of clientele, from employees of nearby businesses to teachers from public and private schools, artists, and community residents. Patrons of the café visit the community center for event rentals ranging from talkback sessions and weddings to exhibitions and performances in our gallery, or are just casual visitors seeking a handcrafted specialty coffee, a bite to eat, and an inviting atmosphere to share creative conversations with friends.

Arts @ Large seeks a professional vendor to lease and operate the café Monday through Saturday, offering food and beverage options that comply with all health and safety regulations. The café serves a diverse range of patrons, including guests of private events, gallery visitors, and community members. Opportunities for small- and large-group catering are available but not required.

The vendor will maintain regular communication with Arts @ Large to ensure smooth operations within the facility and alignment with building logistics and visitor experience standards. Communications are intended to support operational coordination and do not constitute a partnership or joint venture.

Branding and Marketing

Arts @ Large may, at its discretion, provide limited marketing support to the café operator by sharing select offerings through its organizational communication channels. Such support is promotional in nature and does not constitute a partnership or endorsement beyond the normal relationship between a landlord and tenant.

Hours

The vendor will ensure that the café is open, at a minimum, Monday – Saturday 8am – 2pm. Additionally, the vendor will open the café in conjunction with Arts @ Large's after-hours events. If the vendor caters an after-hours rental event, the café should remain open until all patrons have exited the building.

The café will close on days that Arts @ Large has designated as holidays: New Year's Day, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day.

Space

The Arts @ Large Community Center is a renovated 1890s Patrick Cudahy building with three floors. The space officially opened in July 2019. Arts @ Large staff occupy the third floor (and Gallery mezzanine) along with three additional nonprofit tenants. Two to three additional tenants occupy the second floor, and working space is available to all tenants.

The café is on the main floor, adjacent to the Gallery and an art studio. Indoor and outdoor seating for the café is provided, with a small outdoor courtyard featuring a separate entrance. As part of the lease agreement, the vendor's rented space will include the kitchen, prep area, and counter. The cafe seating area and outdoor seating spaces are considered part of the Community Center and, as such are used by Arts @ Large and other building tenants as public spaces. The vendor will be responsible for cleaning and maintaining any common areas used during their operating hours (such as tables/chairs in the Cafe).

Arts @ Large Café is provided with the following restaurant-quality equipment:

- Upright freezer
- Upright Refrigerator
- Shelving
- 2 Convection Ovens
- Double Panini Press
- Toaster
- 2 half-size refrigerators
- 1 half-size freezer
- 1 chest freezer (basement)
- Stainless steel prep table with line refrigeration
- Dishwasher
- 3-compartment sink
- Microwave
- Blender
- Coffee grinder
- Drip coffee maker
- Espresso Machine
- Beverage/Grab-and-Go Cooler

- Various small wares
- Indoor: 8 square tables, 32 chairs
- Outdoor: 4 round tables, 8 chairs, 2 high stools, 4 outdoor chairs, various outdoor side tables

The café kitchen and seating areas are subject to change in aesthetics and table and equipment arrangement, pending approval from Arts @ Large. No structural, mechanical, electrical, or plumbing changes will be allowed.

The café with seating area is 685 sq. ft. and can accommodate approximately 30 seated patrons.

The use of space will be limited according to the priorities of Arts @ Large, as outlined in a sublease agreement, with a guaranteed minimum seating area reserved for Café foot traffic and non-program customers. Most Arts @ Large programs may include sound components (artist talks, performances, etc.) that will be audible throughout Café spaces. Catering opportunities will be available to the Café vendor on a non-exclusive, competitive basis (e.g., receptions, weddings, meetings, etc.).

The terms of the lease or license agreement shall govern all use of space by the vendor. Nothing in this RFP shall be interpreted as granting operational control beyond those terms.

Utilities, HVAC, building insurance, property tax fees, and general cleaning and maintenance, including washrooms, will be included in a monthly management fee calculated based on the rented square footage. Cleaning the kitchen area, the café floors, and the café and outdoor tables is the vendor's responsibility during their operating hours. The vendor will be responsible for all ongoing maintenance/repairs of the cafe's kitchen equipment and plumbing associated with its use.

The vendor will be required to apply for and pay directly all licenses, taxes, fees, charges, rates, duties and the like charged against or in respect of the vendor's occupancy of the premises (such as building permits, food and beverage permits, cost of inspections, insurance, telephone, etc.). Internet access for patrons and the general public is provided by Arts @ Large.

Arts @ Large also offers Artist Marketplace space in the café and will include it in the vendor lease.

Term & Rent

Arts @ Large anticipates entering into a three-year lease term with the selected café vendor. As part of our Creative Business Incubator Program, Arts @ Large may offer below-market rental rates during the lease term to support emerging or community-based entrepreneurs. Participation in the incubator program does not create a partnership, joint venture, or shared ownership of the café operation. The vendor will remain an independent business tenant for all purposes.

Year One: The rent is \$18,000 per year, without any set-off, abatement, or deduction whatsoever, payable in equal monthly installments of \$1,500, due in advance on the first day of each month of the sublease term. Additionally, a monthly management fee will be assessed (calculated based on the prior year's actual costs and the square footage of leased space).

Year Two: The rent is \$21,000 per year, without any set-off, abatement, or deduction whatsoever, payable in equal monthly installments of \$1,750, due in advance on the first day of each month of the sublease term. Additionally, a monthly management fee will be assessed (calculated based on the prior year's actual costs and the square footage of leased space).

Year Three: The rent is \$24,000 per year, without any set-off, abatement, or deduction whatsoever, payable in equal monthly installments of \$2,000, due in advance on the first day of each month of the sublease term. In addition, a monthly management fee will be assessed (calculated based on the prior year's actual costs and the square footage of leased space).

APPENDIX B: Form of Proposal

Background & Description of the Project

Vendors should, at a minimum, address the following in their proposals:

- **Vendor Detail**
A brief description of your business, including any qualifications, certifications (i.e. Safeserve), and licensure that you consider relevant.
- **Relevant Experience**
A description of your business's experience in performing similar work, including two (2) references of work performed for other agencies (or other relevant experience) in the previous five (5) years, and appropriate contact information for references.
- **Lead Personnel**
Identify the lead personnel responsible for delivering the Services that the proponent is prepared to offer, along with their expected level of involvement. Arts @ Large expects that each of the identified lead personnel will be licensed and in good standing to perform the Services in Milwaukee (if required), and that a lead café manager will be on-site daily.
Describe the relevant experience of the lead personnel and include their resumes and professional designations.
Describe ways in which you hire your employees, including background checks and references.
- **Capacity**
Arts @ Large expects the vendor to have sufficient resources available to meet Arts @ Large's service requirements in a timely and efficient manner. Provide a brief description of your firm's staffing resources that will be utilized to meet the service requirements of Arts @ Large.
- **Subconsultants**
Provide the same information as listed above for any subconsultant you propose to engage to provide the Services. Joint ventures or subcontracting arrangements proposed by the vendor may be considered when they add value or expertise. Any such arrangements remain solely the responsibility of the vendor. For example, food, bar, or coffee services may be subdivided with partners or consulting operators under the direction of the lead vendor.
- **Liability Insurance**
Arts @ Large expects the vendor to carry professional liability insurance in an amount not less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence. Provide certificates of insurance outlining the amounts of liability insurance that you hold (required at the time of execution of the lease).
- **Schedule**
Proposals should include a confirmation of whether your company can meet Arts @ Large's schedule for completion of the Services, as set out in this RFP.
- **Conflict of Interest Disclosure**
Disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest that may exist between your firm and its management, and Arts @ Large and its management, and the nature of such conflict of interest. If a proponent has no such conflict of interest, a statement to that effect should be included in its proposal.

Proposals must include:

- A. General description of Café concept;
- B. Sample menu with price points;
- C. Proposed structure of staff, key personnel, and level of service (serving, busing, counter service, etc.), to include how staff is vetted and hired;
- D. Proposed hours of operation;
- E. Any proposed modifications to equipment or space. No structural, mechanical, electrical or plumbing changes will be allowed;
- F. Brief business plan highlighting key customer targets; expected gross income, revenue projections, and start-up costs and initial investment requirements;
- G. If an additional site is added to an existing operation, how does the Arts @ Large site relate to the overall business operation;
- H. Any additional relevant information (this can include a video no longer than 2 minutes, or a PowerPoint no longer than 5 slides);
- I. Testimonials: What does the community say about you?

Tours of the café space can be scheduled through the contact information provided above.

**NOTE: Arts @ Large has a long-term relationship with Anodyne Coffee. Vendor will agree to continue this relationship for product ordering (coffee products at a minimum) and training purposes.*

APPENDIX C: Evaluation Rubric

WEIGHT	SCORING	DESCRIPTION
40%	Culinary, Beverage and Catering Experience	Education/Practical Experience Proven record of industry success Expertise in food & beverage menu development High levels of cleanliness standards Creativity in food & beverage offerings Plating and presentation design Exhibits a high level of food & beverage quality Has experience catering large-scale events Demonstrates a plan for staffing of large catering events Ability to respond to short-notice catering requests
30%	Business & Management Experience	Demonstrates strong knowledge of financial management. Demonstrates strong knowledge of cost controls Demonstrates knowledge of occupational health & safety, HR. Willingness to maximize hours of operation Personal Interview Demonstrated ability to operate effectively within the Arts @ Large facility and maintain strong communication and customer service standards.
20%	Community Commitment	Demonstrates outstanding hospitality in accordance with Arts @ Large's mission. Emphasis on hospitality training with staff Customer service expertise in all areas
10%	Minority Business	Preference will be given to certified SWMBE (Small Women Minority Business Enterprise) businesses.

APPENDIX D: Photos/Branding



