



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Talent Buying and Booking Services

Virginia Theatre

Issued by: Champaign Park District

I. Introduction

The Champaign Park District (“District”) is seeking proposals from qualified firms or individuals to provide Talent Buying and Booking Services for the Virginia Theatre, a historic performing arts venue owned and operated by the District.

The mission of the Champaign Park District is to enhance the community’s quality of life through positive experiences in parks, recreation, and cultural arts, aiming to be a leader in these areas by providing safe and outstanding experiences and facilities.

Through this RFP, the District seeks to expand and strengthen its cultural arts programming by engaging a qualified Talent Buyer/Booking Lead to secure a diverse, high-quality, and financially sustainable calendar of performances that reflects community interests and supports long-term planning efforts.

II. About the Champaign Park District and Virginia Theatre

First organized in 1911 and then established in 1955 by public referendum as a separate unit of municipal government to be led by an elected Board of Commissioners, the award-winning Champaign Park District (“District”) manages and maintains over 690 acres of community parks, playgrounds, and facilities, including the Virginia Theatre, located at 203 West Park Avenue, Champaign, Illinois, 61820.

Champaign, Illinois, sits at the center of Champaign County—at the crossroads of Interstate highways 57, 72, and 74—along with its twin city Urbana, the home of the University of Illinois and also the county seat. Champaign County is located in east-central Illinois, roughly two hours west of Indianapolis, two hours south of Chicago, and three hours northeast of St. Louis.

Owned and operated by the District since 2000, the Virginia Theatre is an historic performing arts center and movie palace hosting concerts, stage plays, dance, spoken word, children's events, films, comedy, private parties, fundraisers, corporate events, meetings, and more. Built in 1921, the Virginia began its life as a vaudeville house, legitimate theatre, and movie venue. Now fully restored (and listed on the National Registry of Historic Places) following a nine million-dollar renovation, the Virginia is ideally positioned to fulfill its role as vibrant community center, active performance space, and bustling cinema.

Programming at the Virginia is a wide-ranging mix of self-presented events and rentals, major tours, community shows, and films. Past live performances include Lily Tomlin, Lyle Lovett and his Large Band, Styx, The Second City, REO Speedwagon, Bill Maher, Robert Cray, Kathy Griffin, ZZ Top, Alison Krauss and Union Station, *The Million Dollar Quartet*, The Manhattan Transfer, Nick Offerman, Emmylou Harris, The Capitol Steps, CHICAGO, Mike Birbiglia, The O'JAYS, Paula Poundstone, Taj Mahal and Keb' Mo', Jack Hanna, Melissa Etheridge, Alabama Shakes, America, Ricky Skaggs, Vince Gill, The MOTH Radio Hour, and many others. The Virginia Theatre is also the exclusive home of the annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival, presented by the College of Media at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Roger Ebert family.

Key characteristics include:

- Approximate seating capacity of 1,400
- Historic architecture with modernized production capabilities
- Location in the heart of downtown Champaign
- A long-standing reputation as a community gathering place

The Theatre serves as both:

- A presenting venue for nationally and regionally touring acts
- A community asset supporting local arts organizations, schools, and events

The District is committed to balancing financial sustainability, historic preservation, and community access in its operation of the facility.

III. Project Overview

Objectives

The selected proposer will support the District in:

- Expanding access to high-quality cultural arts programming
 - Increasing utilization of the Virginia Theatre through consistent booking
 - Securing a diverse mix of local, regional, and national talent
 - Enhancing community engagement through relevant and community-responsive programming
 - Supporting data-informed decision-making related to programming and financial performance
 - Collaborating with District staff to maintain cultural arts programming needs
 - Fostering and building rapport with agents, agencies, permitting organizations, operations staff, union stagehands, vendors, community groups, security teams, and elected officials.
 - Increasing revenue and attendance to reduce operating deficit
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Project Deliverables

The selected proposer will provide:

- Annual booking plan and calendar (minimum 75 events)
 - Ongoing talent procurement and contract negotiation
 - Show-by-show financial projections and deal memos
 - Advancement and settlement documentation
 - Marketing coordination materials (assets, timelines, recommendations)
 - Periodic reporting on attendance, financial performance, and programming outcomes
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IV. Scope of Work

1. Planning and Programming Development

- Collaborate with District staff to define programming goals, budget parameters, and audience targets
 - Develop a forward-looking booking strategy (6–18 months)
 - Identify opportunities aligned with community interests and District priorities
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2. Talent Buying and Booking

- Secure a minimum of 75 events annually
 - Program a balanced mix of:
 - National touring acts
 - Regional and emerging artists
 - Community-focused programming
 - Maintain active relationships with agents, promoters, and tour managers
 - Manage holds, offers, and confirmations
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3. Contract Negotiation

- Lead negotiations including:
 - Financial terms (guarantee vs. percentage deals)
 - Ticket pricing strategies
 - Contract riders
 - Provide deal memos and recommendations for District approval
 - Coordinate contract execution with District staff
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4. Fiscal Agent Coordination

The Champaign Park District will serve as the fiscal agent for all performances.

The District will:

- Execute all contracts
- Receive and manage all revenues

- Pay all expenses and settlements

The Talent Buyer will:

- Negotiate on behalf of the District
 - Provide financial projections and recommendations
 - Support transparency and documentation required for public-sector financial management
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5. Show Advancement and Implementation

- Coordinate all pre-show logistics, including:
 - Technical requirements
 - Hospitality needs
 - Scheduling
 - Collaborate with District staff and facility teams
 - Ensure readiness for all performances
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6. Union Labor Coordination

- Coordinate with District staff and applicable union representatives
 - Ensure compliance with labor agreements
 - Incorporate labor needs into show planning and budgeting
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7. Data Collection and Performance Analysis

- Track attendance, revenue, and performance metrics
 - Provide post-event financial reconciliation
 - Identify trends and opportunities to inform future programming
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8. Marketing Collaboration and Community Engagement

- Collaborate with District Marketing Department to develop show-level marketing strategies and budgets

- Facilitate marketing communications between promoters and District staff
 - Provide promotional assets and timelines
 - Collaborate with District marketing staff (execution remains with District)
 - Support broad community awareness and participation
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V. Performance Expectations

- Minimum 75 confirmed bookings annually
 - Maintain a booking pipeline of 6–18 months
 - Deliver a balanced mix of revenue-generating and community-focused programming
 - Demonstrate responsiveness to community participation trends and interests
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VI. Compensation

Proposers may submit one or more of the following:

- Commission-based (for example, 5%–10% of gross ticket sales)
- Retainer plus commission
- Per-show booking fee

All proposals must include:

- Clear and transparent fee structure
 - Financial assumptions and projections
 - Alignment with the District's fiscal agent model
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VII. Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience booking 50+ events annually
- Established relationships with national and regional talent agencies
- Experience working with public or nonprofit organizations preferred
- Experience working in similar markets (mid-size/non-major metro)

- Knowledge of union environments and settlement processes
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VIII. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must include:

- Firm overview and relevant experience
 - Booking philosophy and approach
 - Sample or past programming calendar
 - Vision for improving profitability while detailing how they will preserve community balance
 - Risk management strategy
 - Financial strategy and deal structure approach
 - Compensation proposal
 - References
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IX. Evaluation Criteria

- Relevant experience and proven results
 - Strength of industry relationships
 - Financial approach and risk management
 - Ability to meet booking volume goals
 - Alignment with District mission and community priorities
 - Communication and collaboration approach
 - Key Performance Indicators
 - Net Revenue Improvement
 - Average attendance rate
 - Total ticket sales growth
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X. Term

Initial contract term: 3 years, with potential renewal options.

XI. General Conditions

- The District reserves the right to reject any or all proposals
- Work must comply with applicable public contracting requirements
- The selected proposer must carry appropriate insurance

XII. Submission Instructions & Timeline

Upon release of this RFP and until the deadline to receive Respondent proposals on May 15, 2026, all official communications from Respondents regarding this solicitation should be directed to:

Sarah Sandquist, Executive Director
Champaign Park District
Email: sarah.sandquist@champaignparks.org

The District shall distribute to all Respondents any responses to questions of a general nature or which would affect the requirements of this RFP. Only written answers to such questions shall be considered binding.

The Respondent is hereby notified that the District is exempt from paying retailers occupation tax, the service occupation tax (both state and local), the use tax, and the service use tax. The State of Illinois Department of Revenue Exemption Number for the Champaign Park District is E9998-5403-06.

In addition, the District's Federal Employer Identification Number is 37-6000474 and is exempt from federal excise taxes.

The Champaign Parks Foundation—a registered 501(c)(3) organization with the mission of providing philanthropic support for the Champaign Park District—is also exempt under the above Illinois Department of Revenue exemption number.

Key Dates

- **RFP Issued:** 4/23/26

- **Optional Pre-Proposal Meeting (Virtual or On-Site): 4/29/26**
- **Deadline for Questions: 5/1/26**
- **Responses to Questions Posted: 5/7/26**
- **Proposal Submission Deadline: 5/15/26 (by 12:00 PM CST)**
- **Proposal Review Period: 5/18/26-5/22/26**
- **Interviews (if conducted): 5/26/26-5/29/26**
- **Anticipated Board Approval: 6/10/26**
- **Contract Start Date: 6/11/26**

Submission Requirements

Proposals must include:

- Cover Letter
- Firm Profile and Experience
- Project Understanding and Approach
- Detailed Scope of Work
- Proposed Timeline
- References (minimum of 3 relevant clients)
- Cost Proposal (clearly itemized)

Late submissions will not be accepted.

The District reserves the right to request any additional information from Respondent that it deems necessary for its review and contracting process.

The District reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive any irregularities or informalities in any proposal or in the proposal procedure, to accept or reject any item or combination of items, and to negotiate terms of proposal with Respondent.

The contract will be awarded to the Respondent whose proposal best complies with the requirements set forth in this RFP, and whose proposal, in the opinion of the District, best serves the interests of the Virginia Theatre and the District, taking into consideration all aspects of the proposal, including the total net cost to the District.

