



# **2026 Catering Services Approved Caterer List Request for Proposal**

**Proposals Due:  
August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**Issued By:  
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Events Manager**

## I. Introduction

### **About Planet Word:**

Planet Word is a nonprofit museum whose mission is to inspire and renew a love of words, language, and reading for children, adults, families, students, and teachers—with the belief that a strong democracy demands a literate population.

Founded by philanthropist Ann Friedman, the museum invites visitors of all ages to discover what words mean to the human experience in a fun, technologically advanced, immersive environment. Opened to the public on October 22, 2020, Planet Word is housed in The Franklin School at 13th and K Streets, NW, a National Historic Landmark with a rich history in public education. Planet Word’s governing Board of Directors includes leaders in education, media, real estate, technology, the arts, and museums.

### **The Building:**

Planet Word occupies the historic Franklin School, a 50,000 square-foot, 5-story building that is located on Franklin Square in Washington, D.C. Built in 1869, The Franklin School was one of the earliest co-ed high schools and teacher-training institutes with a long history of bringing the community together through concerts, public meetings, and other gatherings.

In 1880, Alexander Graham Bell transmitted the first “photophone” message — the precursor of today’s fiber-optic communications — from The Franklin School. Its history in advancing education and telecommunications makes it an ideal home for a museum about words and language.

Restoration and rehabilitation of The Franklin School was overseen by internationally renowned architectural firm Beyer Blinder Belle; the general contractor was Whiting-Turner. Planet Word’s project partners include Local Projects for exhibit design and media production, Solomon Group as exhibit fabricator, installer, and A/V integrator and Lone Shark Games for development and production of “Lexicon Lane: A Word Sleuthing Adventure!”

### **The Museum:**

Planet Word is the first ever voice-activated museum, allowing visitors to use their voices to interact with the exhibits as they move through the galleries. Visitors watch

themselves give a famous speech, sing along to the best of popular songwriting, and learn how to create their own marketing campaign. They tell jokes to make each other laugh, paint with words, and watch as books come to life in a magical library. Language-themed design elements appear in many spaces throughout the building including the lobby, courtyard, stairwells, and even the bathrooms.

The museum boasts ten permanent galleries, a restaurant, an auditorium, classrooms, a gift shop, and stunning event spaces, including a renovated courtyard and a rooftop terrace. The museum hosts 150,000 visitors annually, with the majority of visitation on weekends, holidays, and spring and summer breaks.

In addition to the core exhibits, Planet Word hosts dynamic programs, events, and experiences including unique classes, “Wordshops” for students, free community days for families, and convenings with thought leaders on some of the complex language issues of the day.

#### **About the Founder:**

Ann B. Friedman is the Founder and CEO of Planet Word. Her interest in literacy began with a lifelong love of reading, early work as a copy editor and translator, and a later career as a reading and writing teacher in the Montgomery County Public Schools.

A philanthropist and educator, Friedman’s experience living for a decade as a young mother in Beirut and Jerusalem during civil war and intifada influenced her to devote her career and her resources to efforts that build and support community.

The idea for creating a museum of words and language was further inspired by the opening of the National Museum of Mathematics in NYC – a museum experience that offered a new immersive way of engaging youth in abstract math concepts.

*“Planet Word is a destination where visitors can hear, see, feel, and even taste how words can come alive. Visitors will learn how language connects us as a society, inspires and motivates us to action, shapes our identities, and paints new worlds for us to envision. I can't imagine going without humor, wordplay, song, stories, or conversation – words punctuate our lives with surprise and variety every day.”*

Ann B. Friedman

## **II. Background Information**

**Purpose for Request for Proposals:**

Planet Word is requesting proposals to provide catering services for the various private events that use Planet Word's spaces. The museum will establish a short list of exclusive caterers that meet certain, pre-established criteria. The approved caterer list will be distributed to all Planet Word departments, outside groups, and organizations that want to host private events at Planet Word. *The only caterers that will be used at Planet Word will be those on this approved list, unless Planet Word's CEO or Executive Director chooses to make a rare exception.*

**Benefits to Approved Caterers:**

A partnership with Planet Word provides catering vendors with a unique opportunity to expand their business and increase their revenue stream. As an approved caterer, vendors will have access to new clients and the opportunity to build valuable industry relationships. Planet Word hosts more than one hundred events each year, offering significant opportunity for caterers to meet new clients.

**Types of Catering Activities at Planet Word:**

1. Private Events include groups, outside businesses, and organizations that host their activities and events at Planet Word—whether daytime or evening, large or small. These events at Planet Word are the most common type of event requiring a catering partner. They often require full-service catering, handling food preparation and service, décor, furniture, and post-event clean-up.
2. Internal Events are events curated and organized by Planet Word staff to showcase and celebrate the museum. These events are critical to Planet Word's attraction, retention, and cultivation of donors and members. It is essential for each event to complement and enhance the institution's image.

**Catering Spaces:**

Planet Word's beautiful, historic rooms reflect the surrounding city, juxtaposing the latest technology within a centuries-old infrastructure.

Catering will provide services from a central commissary or kitchen to the museum for staging and final preparation that does not require full cooking. These services will include external private events, as well as catering for internal events. The caterer(s) must have a commissary or 3rd party production kitchen location of sufficient size to

provide catering services to the “event spaces” located on the 3rd and 4th floors and other spaces within the building.

Events and pre- and post-event activities primarily take place in the following spaces: ([Venue Guide](#))

1. The Bloomberg Philanthropies Great Hall
  - a. Located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor
  - b. Dimensions: 3122 ft<sup>2</sup>, 67'x46'6"
  - c. The Bloomberg Philanthropies Great Hall is the architectural centerpiece of the Franklin School and Planet Word's showcase venue both day and night. The 5,000-LED globe that anchors the Spoken World exhibit becomes a stunning chandelier as it rises at the touch of a button up to the towering 22-foot-high ceiling. With fourteen-foot windows overlooking Franklin Square, trompe l'oeil frescoes, and a historic proscenium, the elegant, versatile Bloomberg Philanthropies Great Hall is unlike any other event space in Washington.
  - d. Lexicon Lane, to the south of the Great Hall, can serve as a back-of-house space for vendors.
2. The Word Wall
  - a. Located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor
  - b. Dimensions: 904 ft<sup>2</sup>, 20'8" x43'9"
  - c. The 22-foot-tall wall of words is the star of the show in this unique venue, where guests discover the etymology of words — where do words come from and what will you do with your words? The space is perfect for predinner cocktails, post dinner dessert, an extra bar, or a lounge. This space is only available as an add-on to the Great Hall.
3. The Mansard Room
  - a. Located on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor
  - b. Dimensions: 2697 ft<sup>2</sup>, 67'x40'
  - c. Beautiful exposed beams, wood floors, and frescoed walls make this an unforgettable venue for meetings and celebrations of all sorts. Under a soaring mansard roof at the top of the Franklin School, this space can be configured for elegant dinners, performances, meetings, or receptions.
  - d. This event space also includes an adjacent 832 square foot Rooftop Terrace.
4. The Friedman Family Auditorium (F&B Restricted)
  - a. Located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor
  - b. Dimensions: 1802 ft<sup>2</sup>, 31'x58'
  - c. This 150-seat, beautifully appointed auditorium serves as a venue for Planet Word's internal public programming — film screenings, author book talks, educator convenings, and more.

5. The Welcome Lobby
  - a. Located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor
  - b. Dimensions: 1119 ft<sup>2</sup>, 31'x36'
  - c. Our delightful Welcome Lobby makes a flexible gathering place: its welcome desk can double as a bar, and the glass-enclosed entry vestibule can serve as a check-in area. The space features graceful details like the iconic arches that define the Franklin School, and terrazzo floors embedded with a swirling design of written symbols from the past to the present.
6. The AT&T Plaza (Outdoor Courtyard)
  - a. Located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor
  - b. Dimensions: 2779 ft<sup>2</sup>, 65'x43'
  - c. Anchored by Speaking Willow, an interactive sculpture from renowned artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, the AT&T Plaza is a ground level courtyard oasis just off K Street. The space includes a raised platform at the South end suitable for speakers or a small band.

#### **Catering Access:**

1. Staging, Holding Spaces:
  - a. Lower Level (South Stairwell Landing)
  - b. Lexicon Lane
  - c. 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor (Non-Permanent Space)
  - d. 4<sup>th</sup> Floor
2. Loading Dock: A convenient loading dock is located adjacent to the alley on 13<sup>th</sup> Street in the rear of the museum. As such, commercial service trucks will have good access to appropriately service the catering requirements of the building.
3. Elevator Access: The building is equipped with two (2) elevators that run between the lower level and 4<sup>th</sup> floor. During scheduled events, with Planet Word's approval and following the museum's load-in policies, controlled access to these elevators can be accommodated to stage and execute catering events in the building.
4. Security: The Museum will always have one security officer on duty to operate in an observe-and-report capacity. Additional security needs must be communicated to the Museum.
5. Parking: There is adjacent street parking and a number of commercial, public parking garages within a one block radius of the museum.

#### **Prospective Caterer Profile:**

Prospective catering companies submitting a proposal must have relevant and similar experience in the full-service catering industry, ideally experience working with and at

cultural institutions and/or other high-volume/activity commercial venues that provide the same high-quality food and beverage services for all levels of constituencies and prospective customers.

The caterer should reflect Planet Word's values and brand as a premier museum in the Washington, D.C. area, respecting the executive leadership's commitment to preserving a world-class, state-of-the-art complex. There should be a distinct variety of foods and menu offerings of the highest quality, reasonably and competitively priced, set in an environment that is unique and appropriate to the museum.

Planet Words seeks partners who will provide an excellent product and execute a service component that attracts business, government, and social/lifestyle customers, as well as the core audience of museum-goers and their families.

In addition, approved caterers should be able to demonstrate experience with and ease in working closely with various teams, as Planet Word utilizes a number of departments to stage and execute events, including management, housekeeping, security, guest services, technology, and others.

Among other qualifications, approved caterers are defined as those that meet Planet Word's minimum standards as they relate to:

- Food and service quality.
- Demonstrated ability, willingness, and enthusiasm to bring new customers to Planet Word.
- Demonstrated sales and marketing capabilities.
- Ability to be creative and flexible in the delivery of food and service(s) that may include alcoholic beverages to guests of the museum.
- Reputation and relevant experience at other cultural institutions or similar facility rental locations.
- Acknowledgment that the museum is dedicated to servicing its visitors and the community, and not merely a private event venue.
- Ability to provide catering services with a variety of menus at different price points and to a variety of different internal and special event customers.
- Financial strength and stability.
- Depth and consistency of key hourly, management, and sales staff.
- Business focus: off-premise catering or food service or both.
- Sustainability policies and practices.
- Commitment to preserving and respecting the physical building and its historical features.
- Respect and appreciation for Planet Word staff, museum guests, and other event staff.

In sum, the Museum must have caterers with demonstrated capabilities based on reputation and actual services at other venues, including cultural institutions or other notable locations, to provide a full range of catering -- from high-end black-tie galas to daily meetings, each with similar quality, style, and expertise.

### **Other Related Services and Details**

1. Alcoholic Beverage Licensing and Service
  - a. Planet Word allows alcohol on the premises, assuming the appropriate licenses from caterers and with certain restrictions in certain galleries.
  - b. The caterer will provide responsible alcoholic beverage service training to its management and hourly staff that are involved with alcoholic beverage service and sales.
  - c. It should be noted, if permitted by the Washington DC DCRA / ABC rules and regulations, Planet Word reserves the right to receive and use donated alcoholic beverages at, and for, Planet Word -sponsored and co-sponsored events. In the case of donated products, the museum may engage the caterer's services for set-up and service of these donated products based on mutually agreed upon terms and conditions.
  - d. Planet Word anticipates that its approved caterers will cover food, alcoholic beverage catering, and other services routinely provided by caterers, including but not necessarily limited to décor, flowers, and rentals.
2. Furniture and Equipment Services
  - a. When requested, the caterer will also be responsible for arranging all rental equipment required for events. The caterer will be responsible for setting up the tables, chairs, and related equipment including linen, flatware, glassware, etc., delivered for all such events and assisting the museum when equipment is delivered and picked up.
3. Marketing & Sales
  - a. Sales and marketing functions will be closely coordinated between Planet Word and the approved caterers with all final decisions being at the museum's sole discretion. Planet Word reserves the right of prior review and approval of all marketing plans and materials used for the solicitation of prospective customers.
  - b. Planet Word expects the approved caterers to include the museum in its sales and marketing brochures indicating an "approved caterer" status at Planet Word. Planet Word should also be included in the approved caterers' website, direct mail pieces, and any other applicable collateral material produced by the approved caterers.



- c. Planet Word may request the use of photographs of onsite events from the approved caterers to use in the museum's advertising and marketing program. Approved caterers may be promoted in appropriate Planet Word marketing and communications materials, including the web site. Planet Word will maintain staff to oversee and handle sales, marketing, booking, and operations of all internal and external groups. This will include the development of a marketing and advertising plan to supplement the activities of its approved caterers, which could include, for example:
- Brochures and related collateral material
  - Advertising in special event trade publications
  - Direct mail
  - Exhibiting at trade shows and conferences, as appropriate
  - Internet (the Planet Word website) advertising

### III. Agreement Details

#### **Agreement Period**

The term of this Agreement shall be for a period of no less than 3 years from the effective date of the final signatures by Planet Word Founder and CEO Ann Friedman and an authorized representative from the other party.

#### **Agreement Conditions**

As part of our approved catering agreement, Planet Word asks that vendors agree to provide in-kind catering services for Internal Events.

These in-kind donations not only provide an opportunity for the vendor to showcase their services to our attendees, but they also help support the mission and goals of Planet Word. Charitable efforts can make a company more appealing to potential clients and help increase excitement for the caterer's services. Participation in charitable opportunities also gives vendors the chance to interact with local leaders and business owners.

Caterers can consult with their tax advisors to confirm tax deductibility opportunities related to these in-kind donations. Once the preferred caterer issues an itemized invoice, Planet Word is happy to provide the appropriate tax acknowledgement documentation.

#### **Confidentiality:**

This RFP and all materials submitted are not public information. Partnership information will remain confidential until an agreement is executed, subject to the details described in this proposal.

## IV. Submission Requirements & Timeline

### Content of Proposal:

1. Narrative. Planet Word requests a written proposal from experienced caterers that demonstrates commitment to the museum's goals and values, including:
  - a. Experience
    - i. Please describe your company's history and experience as a vendor for various events, specifically in the Washington, D.C. area. If appropriate, describe your team, the services you provide, and the types of events and venues you have worked on.
  - b. Professionalism, quality, and dedication to service.
    - i. Demonstrate to us what separates your company from the rest. What can you bring to the table that others cannot?
    - ii. Please include examples, testimonials, industry recognition, or other evidence of dedication to quality service.
  - c. Care and asset protection. The Franklin School is a nationally recognized historic site, and its preservation is of the utmost importance.
    - i. What experience do you have working in historic spaces or spaces where extra care has been required. How do you train your staff to care for spaces? Who are your primary sub-vendors (furniture, A/V, décor, staffing), and how do you work with them to ensure that spaces are maintained and preserved?
  - d. Representation. Planet Word wants to ensure that everyone has a voice at the table.
    - i. How is your company committed to diversity and equal representation?
  - e. Corporate Structure and Capacity
    - i. Please describe your organization and structure to us. How large are the teams associated with executive decision making, operations, and account management?
    - ii. Please share with us the specifications of your off-site food preparation facilities. What is the largest number of guests that you can serve at a single event?
    - iii. Please share your 2025 actual gross revenue and/or 2026 estimated gross revenue, which we will use only as an indicator of capacity.
2. Fee Structure

- a. Please describe or attach a document that outlines how you price your services so that we have a sense of your cost. For example, are there nonprofit or government discounts?
3. Required Documents
  - a. W-9 Form
  - b. Insurance Forms
  - c. Alcohol License(s)
  - d. We also reserve the right to request additional documents, as needed.

**Submission Timeline and Format:**

|                                                                    |                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| July 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2026                                       | RFP released                     |
| August 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2026                                     | Proposals due                    |
| September 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 – October 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 | 1:1 Meetings w/ Finalists        |
| Early November                                                     | Preferred selected and announced |

## V. Evaluation of Proposals

**Evaluation Criteria**

The evaluation of the proposals will be based on the following criteria:

- Work Experience
- Approach and Compliance with the Primary Goals of the Museum
- Overall Pricing
- Well-Rounded Offering of Services and Client Satisfaction

The overall review will include the following:

- **Proposal Reviews:** Proposals will be reviewed with work experience, approach to museum goals, pricing and general services in mind.
- **Surveys:** In addition to the RFP, we review results from the post-event surveys that we sent to rental clients regarding catering and third-party vendor satisfaction.
- **Vendor Meetings:** In-person interviews, meetings, and food samplings for short-listed vendors are a part of our approval process. These meetings are expected to be held during September and early October. Specific dates and times for meetings with each vendor will be determined at a later date, but vendors should be prepared to conduct in-person food samplings during the RFP timeframe.

Questions regarding this Request for Proposal shall be submitted to:

Arsema Paulos, Events Associate

Email: [arsema.paulos@planetwordmuseum.org](mailto:arsema.paulos@planetwordmuseum.org)