



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Mobile Food, Beverage & Retail Concessions Program

Date of Issuance: September 8, 2026

RFP Title: Mobile Food Truck & Garden Cart Retail Concessions

Primary Contact: Jeanne Braha, Executive Director, concessions@fona.org

1. Executive Summary & Purpose

Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) seeks competitive proposals from qualified concessionaires, retail operators, or joint-venture partnerships to operate a low-impact, high-quality **Mobile Food, Beverage, and Retail Concessions Program**.

The U.S. National Arboretum is a 451-acre site in Washington, DC with 9 miles of roads/paths, managed by the US Department of Agriculture. The site welcomes approximately **750,000 visitors annually**. Guest visitation is concentrated around weekends, seasonal peaks, and outdoor events ("burst traffic"). To serve our guests effectively without constructing permanent building facilities, we are establishing a mobile concessions footprint comprising:

1. **A Grab-and-Go Food & Beverage Mobile Unit:** (e.g., food truck, vintage trailer, or modular pop-up kitchen, or a cart) serving high-quality quick-service food, snacks, and beverages.
2. **A Mobile Retail Cart:** (e.g., vintage garden cart or pop-up kiosk) offering a curated selection of custom-branded merchandise, local goods, and site-specific souvenirs.

The selected partner will operate under a **turnkey concession license agreement**, assuming 100% of operational, capital, staffing, and inventory responsibilities in exchange for a revenue-share/commission structure paid to FONA.

FONA is the nonprofit partner to the U.S. National Arboretum.

2. Key Dates & Procurement Schedule

Milestone	Date / Time
RFP Issuance Date	September 8, 2026
Optional Pre-Proposal Site Visit	September 30, 2026 at 3pm
Deadline for Written Questions	October 9, 2026 at 5:00 PM EST
Proposal Submission Deadline	October 30, 2026 at 5:00 PM EST
Vendor Interviews & Presentations	1 month after deadline
Contract Award Announcement	December 15, 2026
Target Operational Launch	March 2027

3. Site Profile & Operational Footprint

3.1 Visitor Demographics & Traffic Patterns

- **Annual Attendance:** ~750,000 visitors per year.
- **Traffic Distribution:** Variable. Peak attendance occurs on Friday through Sunday, public holidays, spring/autumn seasons, and during special event programming. Weekdays represent steady, moderate traffic. April and early May are exceptionally busy all week long.
- **Visitor Profile:** Families, garden enthusiasts, tourists, educational groups, and local outdoor recreation visitors.
- The arboretum is open everyday but Christmas, 8am - 5pm. Most summers, FONA underwrites extending evening hours to 8pm on weeknights.
- FONA hosts 2 5ks per year, 2 concerts, 1 garden fair, 2 days of World Bonsai Day festivities each of which attract 750 - 1,000 ticketed guests. Several smaller events, with at least 500 additional guests happen at various times throughout the year.

The concession should offer regular hours of service, but it is not necessary to provide service during all arboretum open hours. A winter furlough is recommended.

3.2 Concession Locations & Site Infrastructure

This concession is at the U.S. National Arboretum, a facility operated and managed by the US Department of Agriculture. FONA recommends the mobile units operate at a spot along the Flowering Tree Walk near the Herb Garden along Meadow Road, and move to event locations or areas of high traffic as suits demand (see recommended location below). Location may need to be adjusted depending on the size of the carts.

Power is available at spots near the visitor center, including a pad near the herb garden, next to the flowering tree pad (across from the far end of bonsai museum), and on the north and east terraces.

Water hookup is not available.

Storage space for the cart(s) will be provided onsite.

4. Scope of Work & Operator Responsibilities

The selected Concessionaire shall be responsible for all aspects of the mobile food and retail operations, including but not limited to:

4.1 Equipment & Aesthetics

- Supply, operate, and maintain all mobile equipment (food truck/cart and vintage garden cart).
- Equipment must complement the aesthetic standards of FONA (high-end, clean, garden/outdoor appropriate).
- Provide all Point-of-Sale (POS) hardware and connections, signage, menu boards, and waste/recycling receptacles immediately adjacent to the units. Wifi is not available at outdoor locations.

4.2 Food & Beverage Concept

- Offer a high-quality, fast-casual menu emphasizing grab-and-go efficiency (cold/hot beverages, sandwiches, salads, regional snacks, artisanal treats). Food that aligns with the arboretum's plant theme (including the herb garden and Washington Youth Garden), as well as seasonal occurrences (cherry trees in spring, for example) would be appropriate.
- Accommodate basic dietary preferences (vegan, gluten-free, kid-friendly).
- Maintain all required county/state health department permits and food handling certifications.

4.3 Retail & Custom Merchandising

- Source, purchase, and manage 100% of retail inventory.

- Consult with FONA on merchandise selection, including items that FONA may provide
- Feature a curated mix of custom-branded FONA and/or US National Arboretum souvenirs, eco-friendly goods, apparel, and botanical/garden-themed items.
- Maintain attractive visual merchandising on the garden cart throughout operating hours.

4.4 Staffing, Permitting & Insurance

- Recruit, hire, train, and manage all staff. Employees must maintain a professional appearance and deliver excellent customer service.
- Secure and maintain at Operator's expense all applicable business licenses, health permits, and sales tax registrations.
- Maintain Commercial General Liability insurance (minimum **\$2,000,000 per occurrence / \$4,000,000 aggregate**) naming FONA as an Additional Insured.

5. Financial Terms & Proposal Expectations

FONA will prioritize a financial structure that minimizes organizational risk while sharing in the upside of high-traffic days.

Financial Proposal Requirements

Proposers must submit a detailed financial proposal outlining:

1. **Commission Percentage:** Proposed percentage of **Gross Sales** paid monthly to FONA for:
 - Food & Beverage Sales (% of Gross)
 - Retail Merchandise Sales (% of Gross)
2. **Minimum Monthly/Annual Guarantee (Optional/Preferred):** Any base guarantee offered in addition to percentage rent.
3. **Capital Investment Commitment:** Outlay for mobile unit buildouts, cart design, branding, and POS integration.

6. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals must be submitted electronically in PDF format to concessions@fona.org by the deadline listed in Section 2. Submissions must include the following sections:

Section A: Company Background & Experience

- Overview of company history, ownership, and experience operating concessions at cultural, park, or high-volume attraction venues.
- Summary of similar clients served and 3 professional references.

Section B: Operational & Concept Plan

- **Food & Beverage Plan:** Sample menu, pricing strategy, equipment specs/photos, and speed-of-service plan for peak traffic.

- **Retail Plan:** Renderings or photos of proposed vintage garden cart, product mix strategy, custom item concepts, and merchandising plan.
- **Staffing & Management:** Organizational chart, staffing ratios for peak vs. off-peak days, and customer service standards.

Section C: Financial Proposal & Pro Forma

- Proposed commission structure and payment schedules.
- 3-year projected sales pro forma based on 750,000 annual attendance.

Section D: Licenses & Insurance

- Proof of ability to secure required commercial liability insurance and any other required health/business permits. FONA will facilitate the permissions required to operate on site.

7. Proposal Evaluation & Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by an internal selection committee based on the following weighted criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Weight
Concept Quality, Aesthetics & Fit with Site (<i>Menu appeal, vintage cart design, brand alignment</i>)	25%
Operator Experience & Proven Track Record (<i>Experience managing burst traffic at cultural sites</i>)	25%
Financial Return & Business Plan (<i>Commission rate, financial stability, realistic pro forma</i>)	30%
Operational & Customer Service Capabilities (<i>Speed of service, staffing plan, POS tech</i>)	20%
Total Score	100%

Recommended Location

