



Request for Qualifications:

Visitor Experience Design and Exhibition Development

Release date: May 18, 2023

This Request for Qualifications (RFQ) is the first in a two-phase selection process. Firms selected at the end of this phase will be invited to submit formal proposals. The goal of this RFQ phase is twofold:

1. To identify potential lead firms to invite to submit formal proposals; and
2. To assemble a list of specialized firms and independent professionals as potential future collaborators with the lead firm and/or the Museum.

I. Institutional Background

The American LGBTQ+ Museum (ALM) will be a new museum of regional, national, and global significance, whose mission is *to preserve, investigate, and celebrate the dynamic histories and cultures of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, as well as those of the emergent and adjacent identities among our communities. Using exhibitions and programs, we seek to advance LGBTQ+ equality through the lens of social justice movements, including, but not limited to, race, gender, class, immigration, and disability. We envision a world in which all people work toward and experience the joy of liberation.*

The concept for the Museum is based on a year-long study that engaged over 3,200 LGBTQ+ people nationwide—including historians, academics, activists, social service providers, students, museum professionals, archivists, writers, and the general public across as many demographic intersections as possible. Our research intentionally sought out the perspectives of LGBTQ+ people whose stories are too often overlooked, including people of color, and those who identify as transgender and gender non-conforming.

We will not be a collecting museum. We will only collect to support our core exhibition, and plan to direct additional potential collections to the existing network of museums, archives, and libraries that collect LGBTQ+ materials. Beyond this, we will borrow collections for rotating exhibitions and may, in some instances, serve as a repository for at-risk artifacts and archives before finding them a home.

Visitors will engage with a range of evolving topics through our core exhibition, and rotating exhibitions. These might include participative elements for exploring current events and sharing personal stories. A space of commemoration and memorial will honor those who came before us. Education and public programs will include school tours, educator trainings, youth programs, cultural events, performances, and community conversations.

In 2026, ALM, an independent 501(c)(3) will open its first home at the New-York Historical Society (N-YHS). We have partnered with N-YHS to occupy the top floor of a planned new addition designed by Robert A.M. Stern Associates, featuring a 4,000 square-foot space designated for our core exhibitions.

The N-YHS addition is currently in Design Development. Construction is scheduled to begin January 2024 with an anticipated exhibit fit-out starting May 2025, and construction completion by December 2025. ALM's space will be delivered as a white box.

N-YHS and ALM have launched a joint capital campaign for the building, and we are on track to reach our full goal of \$175 million by end of 2023.

ALM is fundraising separately for the core and rotating exhibition program (the work outlined in this RFQ) as well as for the virtual museum and other programs. Our anticipated budget for our inaugural 4,000 square-foot core exhibitions is \$4-\$5 million inclusive of build-out and soft costs. Anticipated budget for the rotating/traveling exhibitions will be confirmed during the RFP stage.

ALM's working team includes staff and expert board members. We are also in the process of assembling an advisory council to support content and exhibition development.

II. Project Overview

In addition to the development of our space and our core exhibitions in our home at N-YHS, we will be developing a series of exhibitions at other physical venues as well as virtual offerings/experiences. This multi-venue/platform approach will allow us to tell a fuller story of American LGBTQ+ history and culture, with an emphasis on the liberation movement.

Accordingly, for our inaugural exhibitions program we expect to develop:

- 4,000 square-foot core exhibitions for our main dedicated floor at N-YHS

Additionally, we expect to develop up to seven rotating exhibitions in our first 2-3 years:

- A temporary exhibition in a rotating exhibition gallery at the N-YHS
- Four exhibitions at each of our partner sites (yet to be confirmed) in the boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Staten Island (museums and/or LGBTQ+ Community Centers).
- Two traveling exhibitions that focus on nationally relevant narratives to be presented at sites in communities around the country (yet to be identified).

Finally, we expect to develop:

- ALM's virtual environment/museum to serve people around the country and the world who will not be able to visit the physical exhibitions.

In addition to the display collection that ALM will build, we expect to rely on loans and interpretive elements for these exhibitions.

These inaugural exhibitions, along with public programs, will reflect the latest research from the field as well as our own research into the needs and interests of local queer communities. We will center communities of color, disabled people, and transgender and gender-nonconforming people.

ALM is firmly committed to research and community engagement. Listening to our communities is not just a first step, but an ongoing integrated element of our process. We expect to work collaboratively on content development and programming—including with advocacy groups, cultural producers, social service organizations, and others. Our commitment is to do all our work in partnership.

ALM seeks statements of qualifications from experience and/or exhibition design firms and from independent professionals to support the development of a holistic visitor experience, which will span physical and digital venues and multiple inaugural exhibitions.

This Request for Qualifications is the first in a two-phase selection process—RFQ followed by an invited RFP to a short list. The process has been designed to not only identify a lead firm but to nurture

a collaborative and inclusive working model by identifying—from the start—additional highly specialized firms and professionals whose knowledge, creative approach, lived experience, and values closely align with ALM’s mission and values, but may not be known to ALM or potential lead firms.

Phase 1 RFQ

The goals of this phase are:

1. Identify up to five firms as candidates to lead our Visitor Experience Design and Exhibition Development.

In collaboration with ALM staff, board experts, and advisory content specialists, the selected lead firm will oversee a multidisciplinary team in the development, design, and implementation of all exhibitions and experiences across physical and virtual platforms, ensuring that the Visitor Experience is carried through all formats.

Up to five selected firms will be invited to participate in Phase 2.

2. Identify/create a list of additional firms and independent professionals with specifically relevant skills and knowledge related to LGBTQ+ communities.

We anticipate that a selection of these firms/professionals will be invited to collaborate with the lead firm during the Visitor Experience RFP process.

This list will also be used as a resource for the lead firm and ALM during subsequent RFPs for more specialized services once the project moves forward into implementation.

Submissions should include firm profile and approach, team members, and relevant experience. (Detailed instructions are described in Section III.)

Phase 2 RFP

Leading firm candidates will receive a Request for Proposals to create Visitor Experience and develop Inaugural Exhibitions and will have access to additional reference materials and a detailed selection assignment brief. Potential lead firms will be asked to team up with smaller firms and/or independent professionals from the list compiled by ALM. (Lead firms will be in control of their partnerships and selections and will be given ample time to engage in planning discussions.)

We are also excited about early conversations with nationally recognized Inclusive Design and Accessibility consultants **Prime Access** (<https://www.pac.bz/>). We anticipate integrating their services to ensure that the *design of our gallery space, exhibitions, programs, and digital platforms is inclusive as it is developed.*

A stipend will be provided to support the RFP submission—anticipated to include preliminary ideas/perspectives/potential conceptual approaches for the Visitor Experience at ALM, as well as scope of services, team configuration, project schedule, and fees.

Team Selection Process Key Dates

Phase 1	
May 18	RFQ posted
June 2 – 9	Q & A Period
June 30	Qualifications submissions due
Phase 2	
July 21	RFP launch: Lead Firm candidates and short list contacted
September 18	Proposals due
September 25 (week of)	Presentations TBD
October 2	Lead Firm selected
November 1	Visitor Experience Design & Exhibition Development team starts work

III. Request for Qualifications: Submission Process

Applicants are invited to familiarize themselves with the contents of our website to learn more about ALM's origin and planning trajectory to date. <https://americanlgbtqmuseum.org/about/>

Additionally, we invite you to review the following documents (available for download):

- Summary of our Concept document
https://americanlgbtqmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ALM_Concept-Summary-RFQ_F.pdf
- Preliminary floorplan of our core exhibition space
https://americanlgbtqmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ALM_Exhibition-space_-A105-00-FOURTH-FLOOR-PLAN.pdf

Q & A Period

- Clarifying questions may be submitted by June 2, 5:00pm EDT, via email to: [rfq@ americanlgbtqmuseum.org](mailto:rfq@americanlgbtqmuseum.org)
- Answers will be posted in our RFQ site by June 9, 5:00pm EDT
<https://americanlgbtqmuseum.org/2023/05/rfq-visitor-experience-design-and-exhibition-development/>
- During the open period of the RFQ no other inquiry methods will be accepted

Who Should Respond?

Firms and independent professionals with expertise in one or more of the following areas are encouraged to submit qualifications:

- Interpretive Planning
- Experience Design
- Interior Architecture
- Exhibition Development (including content development)
- Exhibition Design
- Exhibition Fabrication/Installation Oversight
- Media Production and Digital experience(s)
- Sensory approaches in exhibition content and design
- Participative methods and knowledge generating practices in exhibitions.
- Archival Research and/or Curation of LGBTQ+ Content
- Graphic Design
- Lighting Design
- Oral Histories
- Other design types with potential for innovative applications in exhibition storytelling [stage design, fashion, etc.]

The Board of Trustees and professional staff at ALM are committed to building a cultural institution that advances liberation, through its public-facing activities, governance, and internal operations. Individuals and teams that include members who identify as LGBTQ+ / Queer, Trans / Non-Binary / genderqueer, Female, Disabled People, and Persons of Color are encouraged to apply.

Requested Materials

1. Cover letter with clear contact information
2. Firm profile and bio(s) of the team members that would be assigned to this project.
3. Project descriptions or case studies for 3 - 5 relevant projects. (Feel free to include links to the relevant project websites if informative and applicable). *For firms with over 25 staff: Please identify important collaborations with subcontractors, describing how they engaged in your process.*
4. One-page narrative: Please share up to 500 words describing your firm's experience (or, for individuals, your personal experience) with and/or commitment to museums or other cultural organizations dedicated to social justice, activism, and/or civil/human rights.

Submission instructions

- Qualification submissions should be prepared as a single pdf document containing all the “requested materials” listed above, the pdf document should be in an accessible format usable by screen readers. Keep the final document under 12 pages.
- To submit, complete our brief registration form and upload your accessible pdf file here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RFQ_Submissions
- Only one file will be accepted per submission. File size shouldn't exceed 16M.
- **Qualifications Submission deadline: June 30, 2023**

IV. Requirements and Selection Criteria

For this RFQ phase, firms and individual practitioners will be assessed on how their experience and skills align with the institutional goals expressed in these materials as well as our digital presence more broadly. Submissions will also be evaluated based on experience working with cultural institutions, exhibitions, and other relevant experiences; knowledge of LGBTQ+ history and current issues; and a track record of successful collaboration. These qualifications should emerge in your cover letter and/or narrative as well as the examples of your professional experience.

Please highlight M/WBE and/or LGBTQ+ certifications that your team may have. The evaluation criteria in the RFP (next stage) will include representation requirements.