



Neon Sign Restoration Request for Proposal (RFP)
Date Issued: Wednesday, May 1, 2024
Proposal Submission Deadline: Friday May 10, 2024

I. REQUEST

The American Sign Museum (ASM) is requesting proposals and quotes from qualified neon shops, conservators, and restorers to return to operation two historic neon signs, Basinger Jewelers (c. 1930s) and the Plaza Motel (c. 1950s). The signs are part of the ASM's collection and will be exhibited in the museum once restored. Firms bidding on the work must have experience in the stabilization of nearly century-old neon signs for exhibition and in recreating/creating high-quality neon tubing for large-scale signs (see measurements below).

II. BACKGROUND

The American Sign Museum is a singular institution with the most comprehensive sign collection in the United States. The Museum covers more than 100 years of American sign history and displays more than 1,000 signs and artifacts, making it the most comprehensive museum of its kind. With a mission to educate the community about the history of the sign industry and its significant contribution to commerce and the American landscape, the Museum is organized to preserve, archive and display a historical collection of signs in their many types and forms. Founded in 1999, the American Sign Museum opened its doors to the public in Spring 2005 at the Essex Studios in Walnut Hills Cincinnati. With the collection quickly outgrowing its rented space the ASM unveiled its permanent home on June 23, 2012, in a former clothing factory in Camp Washington, just northwest of downtown Cincinnati. The renovated building features 19,000+ square feet of exhibit space, 28-foot ceilings able to accommodate sizable outdoor signs, a working neon shop, flexible event space, and an extensive archive of books, photos and documents reflecting the art, craft and history of signmaking.

The Museum is the largest and only Museum of its kind garnering attention from national press, including Forbes, USA Today, Atlas Obscura, LA Times, Roadtrippers and Lonely Planet. The Museum is ranked #4 out of 422 things to do in Cincinnati on TripAdvisor, just behind the Cincinnati Zoo, Great American Ballpark and the Cincinnati Art Museum. A cultural icon in Cincinnati, the Museum greets over 50,000 visitors annually from all over the world including Europe, Asian, and Australia.

The restoration of these two collection signs is part of the *A Campaign for the ASM*, a \$4.5 million capital project that expands the Museum's gallery spaces, adds new educational areas, and lends an enhanced perspectives to the preservation of this rich American art. The two signs will be exhibited in the newly expanded Main Street immersive gallery once it is completed in July 2024. The budget for the restoration of the Basinger Jewelers and Plaza signs is \$7,430. Part of the restoration is funded by a grant from the Ohio History Connection's History Fund grant program.

III. PROJECT SCOPE & OBJECTIVES

This rehabilitation project is for the following two signs:

- Basinger's Jewelers Neon Sign, 1930s, porcelain enamel and neon, 39"Wx104"Hx18"D, 2018.0024.0001
- Plaza Motel Neon Sign, 1950s, porcelain enamel and neon, 64"Wx145"Hx15"D, 2023.0008.0001

This rehabilitation project seeks to achieve the following goals:

- Returning/restoring all neon tubing, lighting fixtures, wiring, housings, and related electronics to functional and safe operating condition.
- The work may include repairing/repumping existing glass or recreating glass and parts as needed. Extra care shall be taken in handling the signs as historical artifacts with appropriate materials and techniques applied such as use of gloves, polyethylene mounts, as needed and in consultation with the Curator.
- Other than light cleaning as approved by the project director, existing patina on each sign is to remain and not be disturbed unless required to return the signs to working condition. In keeping with the ASM's collections care philosophy, the goal of the project is to return the neon signs to operation, not to restore them to a "like new" appearance. The project director will address any questions about patina vs. working condition when they arise and will be the final decision-making authority.
- Document work on the signs in photographs, video, and in writing. The purpose of the documentation is to record details about how the signs work, their manufacture, and to illustrate milestones in the transition from "before" working condition to "after" – working condition and exhibition. The successful bidder will have the responsibility of documenting the work and will be assisted by the Collections team.

Milestones for the project include:

- Preparation of each sign for rehabilitation work, including assessing each sign to document the labor and parts needed to return the sign to functionality.
- Acquiring the parts needed need to return each sign to functionality.
- Completion of all work to return the sign to functionality. Work may include:
 - Reusing existing glass, addressing repairs, blackout areas, and repumping as needed
 - Recreation of new glass, including the design, bend, pump and installation
 - Installing new glass housings or creating custom housings as deemed necessary by project
 - Refining aesthetics by way of blackout paint, possible crackle treatment, etc., as necessary
 - Troubleshooting of existing mechanical and electrical wiring as appropriate, and/or replacement of wiring mechanisms; all modern electrical standards must be followed, and amp meterage information will be provided to the Vendor by the Collections team
- Testing each sign for operability and troubleshooting as needed to ensure consistent operation during the expected indefinite life of the exhibit.

Complete restoration no later than June 30, 2024. Both signs must be exhibit-ready, meaning all electronics are tested for functionality and safety, with installation amps confirmed and addressed.

IV. SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

The following items must be included in the proposal:

- Qualifications of shop/restorer: include description of qualifications.
- Personnel: name and contact information for project manager and their resume.
- Scope of Services: summarize the services you will provide and approach to the scope of the project.
- Timeline. A project timeline to include key milestones beginning with the date of start of study.
- and estimated completion date.
- Cost. State the total cost to complete the scope of work including time allocation.
- budget for assigned personnel, itemization of design, and deliverables, and total.
- lump sum fee proposal.
- Include up to 3 references from recently completed projects.

RFQ responses are limited to 6 pages excluding resumes and references. Electronic submittals preferred. Please send to Casey Goldman-Davis cgoldmandavis@americansignmuseum.org. Mail submittals are also acceptable to:

Casey Goldman-Davis, Curator of Collections & Programming
American Sign Museum
1330 Monmouth Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45225

V. SELECTION

All complete and responsive proposals will be evaluated by the Collections team at the American Sign Museum. The evaluation will be based on the information submitted, as well as any related information that the American Sign Museum may discover or request in analyzing the proposal. In addition, to the extent that the proposed project meets objectives described earlier, a professional services contract will be executed between ASM and the Proposer.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The criteria listed below will be used to evaluate the Proposers to determine the finalists and apparent successful Vendor:

- **Comprehensiveness of Services:** Overall capabilities and experience of the Proposer to provide the requested services described in this RFP.
- **Experience and Qualification of Assigned Staff:** The credentials and experience of the assigned staff selected to perform the requested services.
- **Qualitative Criteria:** A collaborative process, demonstrating an enthusiasm and passion for the subject matter.
- **Cost of Services:** Total proposed charges. Questions about any matter contained in this RFP should be emailed to no later than ten (10) business days prior to the deadline of this RFP.

Submission Deadline: 4:00 pm Eastern Standard Time, Friday, May 10, 2024