



Toronto Botanical Garden (TBG) Request for Proposal (RFP) for Seasonal Café Operator

Issued: March 10, 2025

Responses Due: March 28, 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

The Toronto Botanical Garden (TBG) invites proposals from experienced and passionate food and beverage operators to manage and operate its seasonal café, located in the historic barn on the TBG property at 777 Lawrence Avenue East.

We seek an operator who shares our commitment to connecting people with plants, sustainability, local food sourcing, health and wellness, and plant-focused offerings while enhancing the visitor experience and supporting our mission and vision, and a Garden for All.

This RFP outlines the expectations, requirements, and selection criteria for potential operators. The chosen operator will play a vital role in supporting TBG's strategic goals and sustainability efforts while creating a high-quality, unique culinary experience for visitors.

TBG is a registered charity managing facilities on behalf of the City of Toronto under a long-term management agreement

MISSION: Toronto Botanical Garden connects people and plants, fostering sustainable communities and developing reciprocal relationships with nature through lifelong learning.

VISION: Toronto Botanical Garden is a garden for all; a diverse community that recognizes the life-giving role of nature, working together for a more sustainable world.

II. PROJECT OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

The TBG Café should:

- Align with TBG’s mission and vision.
- Offer a plant-focused menu with locally sourced and sustainable ingredients.
- Use sustainable dishware and packaging.
- Engage with TBG’s audience through daily service and special event catering.
- Develop products and/or experiences that contribute to food tourism.
- Comply with public health and safety regulations.
- Be responsible for insurance, security, internet, health & safety, green pass, and required equipment.
- Enhance visitors’ experience and satisfaction.

III. CAFÉ SPACE DETAILS

- The space is available under a two-year contract with an exit clause.
- Monthly rent will apply; utilities are included.
- Warming kitchen only—no onsite cooking.
- Equipment and furnishings from the prior operator may be available.
- Branding and naming subject to TBG approval.
- The operator must maintain the cleanliness and upkeep of the space.

IV. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Interested parties should submit a comprehensive proposal that includes:

1. Operational Plan

- Proposed schedule, including opening and closing dates and holiday operations.
- Staffing model and hours of operation.
- Timeline to launch operations.

2. Concept and Offerings

- Sample menu with pricing.
- List of products available for sale.
- Approach to sourcing ingredients and sustainable packaging.

3. Engagement and Impact

- Strategies for enhancing visitor experience and increasing attendance.
- Plans for collaboration with TBG programs and special events.
- Alignment with TBG's sustainability efforts.

4. Financial and Legal Considerations

- Business structure and relevant experience.
- Financial capability and business plan.
- Proof of insurance and ability to comply with legal requirements.

5. Experience and Qualifications to act as the Concessions Operator

Per our management agreement with the City of Toronto, all proposals must include you/your company's knowledge, expertise, ability, and experience in the following areas:

- food safety, and handling
- food business management
- labour relations, staffing and training;

- sales and marketing;
- financial control and reporting; and
- recycling and waste reduction.

V. SITE VISITS & QUESTIONS

- **Optional Site Visit:** A site visit will be scheduled in mid-March.
- **Clarifications:** Questions due by March 17, with responses provided by March 20.

VI. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Alignment with TBG Mission & Sustainability Goals (25%)** – Commitment to sustainability and plant-forward offerings.
- **Operational & Financial Feasibility (25%)** – Ability to launch and sustain the business effectively, including but not limited to:
 - Food Business Management
 - Labour relations, staffing, and training
 - Financial control and reporting
- **Visitor Engagement & Guest Experience (20%)** – Strategies to enhance visitor experience and engagement, including but not limited to:
 - Sales and Marketing
 - Participating and Aligning with TBG events and general visitation
- **Menu & Product Offerings (15%)** – Quality, pricing, and uniqueness of menu items.
- **Experience & References (15%)** – Relevant food industry experience and ability to successfully operate within a cultural institution. Includes but not limited to:
 - Prior experience and successful business ventures
 - Food safety and handling
 - Proof of relevant licenses (e.g. food handling certification, business license, etc)

VII. SELECTION TIMELINE

- **March 10:** RFP posted on website and promoted via email and social media.
- **March 17:** Questions due.
- **March 20:** Responses to questions provided.
- **Mid-March:** Proposed Site Visit.
- **March 28:** Proposal submission deadline.
- **April 2-10:** Interviews with shortlisted applicants.
- **April 15:** Final selection.
- **May 9:** Soft opening (aligned with TBG Plant Sale and Mother's Day weekend).
- **May 24:** Full operation.

VIII. SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

To be considered, please submit an electronic copy of your proposal (preferably in a non-editable format, as PDF format) with the subject line "Cafe Operator." The filename must bear the Company or Proprietor's Name and "Cafe Operator". Proposals should be no longer than 10 pages, saved as one file.

Proposals must be submitted electronically by March 28, 2025 at 5 pm EST, to:
exec-assistant@torontobotanicalgarden.ca. Late submissions will not be considered.

For additional information or to schedule a site visit, contact:

Stephanie Jutila, CEO, sjutila@torontobotanicalgarden.ca,

Toronto Botanical Garden, 777 Lawrence Avenue East, Toronto, ON M3C 1P2

We look forward to partnering with an operator who will contribute to the vibrancy and sustainability of the Toronto Botanical Garden.

VIV. ADDENDUM

For your reference, the following documents are included as appendices to this RFP:

- **2025 Audience Engagement & Promotional Calendar.** [Click here to view.](#)
- **Café Floor Plan** (available upon expressing interest in the RFP and scheduling a tour)
- **Pictures of the Café and TBG**







- **Details from TBG/City Management Agreement that related to Concessions**

“2. Concession Operations

(1) the Concession Operator shall at its own cost and expense be responsible for all matters associated with the the Concession operations, including, without limitation:

- a. staff hiring, training, uniforms, and payroll in line with the City’s Fair Wage Policy;
- b. administrative costs and overhead;
- c. food items, subject to subsection 2(2);
- d. food preparation, service, and storage, in line with food safety regulations and best practices;
- e. cookware and dishware;
- f. food packaging and accessory items such as but not limited to sugar, stirrers, napkins, and condiments;
- g. transportation and deliveries, which should occur during off-peak visitor times and be communicated to the City in advance whenever possible to reduce potential scheduling conflicts within the delivery area;
- h. point of sale systems, devices, and software;
- i. waste management and disposal, including the provision of waste and recycling receptacles;
- j. pest control in line with applicable health and safety regulations and best practices;
- k. custodial duties and cleaning supplies to maintain cleanliness of the Concession Area including floors, ceilings, walls, windows, and surfaces; cooking and storage spaces; cooking and service equipment and fixtures; and the outdoor seating area immediately adjacent to the Concession Area entrance;
- l. maintaining and requiring peaceable conduct in the Concession Area and preventing unlawful activities, which may include contacting Toronto Police Services, by-law enforcement, or similar to support in this effort;

m. purchase or rental of equipment, furniture, or similar required for the operation of the Concession;

n. repairs and replacement of equipment which it owns or has responsibility as determined by section 7;

o. minor repairs and maintenance to the interior of the Concession Area, including repairs required as a result of vandalism, subject to review by the Liaison Committee and approval by the General Manager;

p. marketing, advertising, and promotion of the Concession, which may include signage, as further described in section 5.

(2) All Food to be offered by TBG or the Concession Operator shall be of high quality in terms of nutritional value and food safety, and the General Manager and/or the City's Medical Officer of Health or other City staff or contractors, shall have the right without notice to TBG or the Concession Operator to individually or jointly inspect at any time the quality of the Food and any other items which are offered for sale and the manner in which the same are kept and served at the Concession, and the said General Manager or Medical Officer of Health or other City staff or contractors may require TBG to make

such changes in respect thereto as in either or both of their opinion(s) are desirable.

(3) Notwithstanding section 1, TBG or its Concession Operator may create, operate, and store a temporary, pop-up, or mobile Concession Booth at its sole cost and expense outside of TBG's managed area provided TBG or its Concession Operator secures all applicable licenses or permits, which may include a license for a mobile food premises or a special event permit (either standalone or part of a larger event).

(4) The design and specifications of the Concession Booth as well as its deployment schedule must be reviewed by the Liaison Committee prior to its placement and are subject to approval by the General Manager.

(5) TBG shall ensure that nothing is done or kept at or on the Concession Area or at the Concession Booth that:

a. is explosive, dangerous, flammable or noxious (except cleaning products which may typically be used in such areas), without the prior written consent of the General Manager;

- b. may cause any unusual, noxious, or objectionable smoke, gases, vapours or odours to be emanated from the Concession Area or Booth;
- c. may cause or produce any unusual, disruptive or excessive noise to be emitted from the Concession Area or Booth;
- d. causes or permits the discharge of any noxious or contaminated substance into, or any object causing a blockage or obstruction to, the drainage or sewage system serving the Concession Area (the City may remove such substance or object at the sole expense of TBG);
- e. may damage, injure or impair the operation of any water, drainage, life-safety (fire alarms, extinguishers, etc.) or sewage system serving the Concession Area;
- f. may unreasonably interfere with the effectiveness or accessibility of utility, heating, ventilating or conditioning systems or portions of them in the Concession Area;
- g. overloads any floor in the Concession Area;
- h. may be a nuisance, or cause disturbance to or interfere with the users or occupants of any neighbouring property, or which in the opinion of the General Manager may cause damage to the Concession Area or any neighbouring property;
- i. may impede City access to the Concession Area, as further described in section 9.