

Obama Library To Firms Vying To Build Library: Diversity Is Essential

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WOODLAWN — The Obama Foundation is asking the four construction teams vying to build the presidential center to set high standards for local and minority hiring.

The foundation announced four finalists Thursday morning and also the standards for hiring the foundation is setting for each.

Each of the firms has to lay out how it would meet a commitment to awarding half of its subcontracts to “diverse suppliers,” which expands the normal definition of firms from women and minority-owned firms to also include veteran-, disabled- or LGBTQ-owned firms.

As the definition of inclusive hiring is broadened, the foundation is specifying that at least 35 percent of contracts need to go to minority-owned firms.

Each of the firms also has to detail how it plans to recruit and retain employees from Woodlawn, Washington Park, South Shore and the South and West sides more broadly.

“The Obamas chose to develop the Obama Presidential Center on the South Side to give back to the community that has given so much to them. With this [request for proposals], the foundation has established significant and aggressive goals for diversity and inclusion,” said David Simas, CEO of the foundation. “We are committed to creating meaningful opportunities and jobs for local businesses, community members, and underrepresented communities in the South Side and throughout Chicago, and using our platform to pioneer new approaches to engaging minority populations in the construction industry to provide not just short-term jobs, but long-term professional opportunities.”

It’s not clear what would happen if the firm chosen fails to live up to the set standards. Community groups continue to push for a community benefits agreement that would codify the standards and create repercussions if they’re not met.

The firms being considered include:

- Clark/Smoot Presidential Builders, a partnership that includes Clark Construction Group, Smoot Construction Company, GMA Construction Group and Bowa Construction
- Lakeside Alliance, a partnership that includes Turner Construction Company, Power & Sons Construction, UJAMAA Construction Inc., Brown & Momen Inc. and Safeway Construction Company
- Power Mortenson Partners, a partnership that includes Power Construction Company, Mortenson Construction, GMA Construction, Bowa Group
- W.E. O'Neil Construction Company