RE-ENVISIONING BRANCH LIBRARIES

**Request for Qualifications
for Participants in Design Study**

Deadline: June 20, 2014, 11:59 p.m. EST

Center for an
Urban
Future

T H E A R C H I
T E C T U R A L
L E A G U E N Y

Project
The **Center for an Urban Future** (CUF) and **The Architectural League of New York** are partnering to produce a design study that will articulate possibilities for the design of branch libraries in New York City.

The broad challenges that branch libraries face include enabling access to the burgeoning resources of the digital world while continuing to circulate books and other print resources; enhancing capacity to serve as physical and civic hubs of their communities; and accommodating the full range of programs they offer, from adult literacy and ESL to after-school programs for children and teens and technology training for senior citizens.

We invite architects and designers interested in participating in this design study to organize interdisciplinary teams and to submit qualifications and a statement of interest in response to this Request for Qualifications. A selection committee will recommend up to six teams to participate in the design study. Selected design teams will present their work at a public event in early November 2014 and will have subsequent opportunities to present their work through a variety of Architectural League platforms, both live and digital, including our two online publications, archleague.org and *Urban Omnibus.*

The designs generated will be used to provoke conversation about how best to support the library systems through design, funding, and public awareness of the vital services they provide.

Background
New York City's 211 branch libraries provide vital social infrastructure for the empowerment of communities and their residents. Some of this empowerment is economic: library programs offer opportunities for skill-building and life-long, non-institutional learning – opportunities that support those New Yorkers eager to share their skills and knowledge, those who seek a "third place" to investigate and incubate new business opportunities, and those who lack the basic language, literacy, and technological skills needed to access decent paying jobs. And some of this empowerment is personal and civic: libraries are social hubs, providing crucial services, including child care and language acquisition workshops, and affording both individual and collective opportunities for the free acquisition of knowledge.

Yet, a range of obstacles – financial, political, and architectural – prevents New York from realizing the full potential of its branch libraries. Few libraries are open more than 40 hours a week. A majority of the buildings were built before 1975—many before 1929—and are now in urgent need of physical upgrades. Older library designs do not respond to the usage patterns of specific user groups – like seniors, teens, or recent immigrants – and even some newer branches are poorly configured for contemporary programs, with insufficient space for classes, collaboration, or computers. The proliferation of services libraries provide suggests a rethinking of the spatial organization of staff and users, quiet and loud, private and public, physical and digital resources. The adoption of new technologies has only just begun. Demand for library services is very high but not evenly distributed: some branches are prohibitively congested, while others have underutilized spaces that could be re-imagined for new uses, such as small business incubators, co-working spaces, community rooms, or classrooms.

The libraries need new options and ideas. How might branch libraries realize efficiencies in their existing physical plants? How could programming expand beyond the footprint of their buildings? What other models of service delivery – on-site or off-site, through partnerships, pop-ups, and more – are applicable? What are the design, technology, and infrastructure innovations needed for neighborhood libraries to meet the demands and context of urban community life in the 21st century?

Design Study
Last year, CUF published *Branches of Opportunity*, a report that details how New York City's three library systems serve more people in more ways than ever before yet remain undervalued by policymakers. In early July, CUF will publish a follow-up report, a "blueprint" that extensively documents the physical plant and capital needs of New York City's branch libraries. The release of this blueprint will coincide with the launch of a three-month design study, directed by The Architectural League. Over the course of the study, up to six interdisciplinary design teams will address questions of location, development strategy, financial feasibility, operation, spatial organization, and architectural form.

Possible approaches to the architectural, financial, and programmatic limits of existing branch libraries are numerous: reimagining existing buildings and reconfiguring interior and exterior space; pursuing creative partnerships with a variety of non-profit and for-profit entities; identifying potential new sources of revenue; adapting to demographic changes in the city, including the growth in the size of the senior and recent immigrant populations; acknowledging and responding to the use of city capital funds.

To investigate some of these approaches, design study teams will produce design concepts and development strategies, communicated through narrative descriptions, financial scenarios, drawings and other means as appropriate. The Architectural League will provide the selected teams with background materials including specific design challenges and CUF's two reports on branch libraries. (Branches of Opportunity can also be accessed here.) Architectural League staff will interact with and provide guidance to design teams at a number of points during the design study process.

Each team will present its work at a public event in the fall of 2014, which will be attended by leaders from public policy and cultural institutions, the library systems, and city government. The Architectural League will work closely with each team to refine ideas and communication strategies for this event.

Selection Committee
Seema Agnani, Chhaya Community Development Corporation
Sarah Goldhagen, *The New Republic*
Henry Myerberg, HMA2 architects
Lyn Rice, Rice+Lipka Architects
and members of the project team

Pre-registration
Teams are encouraged to signal their intent to respond to this RFQ by sending the name of the team leader, along with contact information (email address, phone number, and mailing address) to librariesRFQ@archleague.org by June 9, 2014. Answers to any questions submitted about the RFQ will be emailed to teams that have preregistered (see below).

Questions
Please submit any questions about this RFQ or the Reenvisioning Branch Libraries project to librariesRFQ@archleague.org no later than Monday, June 9, 2014. Answers will be emailed to all teams who have pre-registered.

RFQ SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Cover Sheet
Applicants must include a cover sheet with name, mailing address, telephone number, and email. Please include the names and emails for each team member and identify one team member as the lead contact.

Statement of interest and experience
Statements must not exceed 500 words. Statements must include information about design philosophy and approach, explain the team's interest in this project, and demonstrate an understanding of the impact of neighborhood libraries on urban life.

Team experience
Please include 100-word bios for team leaders. The jury will consider the diversity of professional disciplines among design teams in the selection process. Teams that include expertise from planning, real estate development, financial analysis, or information science are preferred. Entries must include a one-page resume for each key team member.

Images
Entries may include up to three pages of images of past work with identification. Images must be incorporated into the submitted PDF.

Each example of relevant work should be accompanied by a brief description of how each past project relates to the challenges facing branch libraries in New York City.

Application Format and Deadline

The application package must be submitted as a single PDF (8 ½" x 11" page) of not more than 15 megabytes, emailed to librariesRFQ@archleague.org no later than 11:59 p.m. EST on June 20, 2014.

Eligibility
Architects and designers are invited to apply. Applicants need not reside in New York City but, if selected, must commit to attending three in-person meetings with project staff over the course of the study. The designated lead contact for each team must commit to presenting in person at the public event in November.

Compensation
Each design team will receive an honorarium of $5,000 to carry out work on the design study.

Project Team
David Giles and Jeanette Estima, Center for an Urban Future
Rosalie Genevro, Anne Rieselbach, Cassim Shepard, The Architectural League
Shannon Mattern, The New School

About The Architectural League of New York
The Architectural League nurtures excellence in architecture, design, and urbanism, and stimulates discussion and debate about the critical design and building issues of our time. As a vital, independent forum for architecture and its allied disciplines, the League helps create a more beautiful, vibrant, innovative, and sustainable future.

For more information, visit archleague.org and urbanomnibus.net.

About the Center for an Urban Future
The Center for an Urban Future is a NYC-based think tank dedicated to highlighting the critical opportunities and challenges facing New York and other cities, and providing fresh ideas and workable solutions to policymakers. The Center's primary focus is on growing and diversifying the local economy, expanding economic opportunity and targeting problems facing low-income and working-class neighborhoods.

For more information, visit nycfuture.org