

Obama Foundation searching for “diversity consultant”

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WASHINGTON – The Obama Foundation announced on Friday a search for a “diversity consultant” to enforce minority contracting goals for the future Obama Presidential Center and to police pledges that jobs will flow to South and West Side residents.

This move comes as former President Barack Obama told local residents earlier in the month that his foundation will not sign any community benefits agreements with neighborhood groups who are skeptical that the foundation can keep its promises to the community.

In August, the foundation unveiled minority contracting goals and the firms in the running for the contract to manage the construction of the Obama Center, to be built in Jackson Park.

The foundation demanded that the winner commit to minority contracting and hiring benchmarks designed to benefit struggling residents on the South and West Sides of Chicago, including youths and ex-offenders and specifically residents of Woodlawn, South Shore and Washington Park.

However, what the foundation lacked in August was any plan to police enforcement of these goals — an important factor to prevent cheating and to uncover minority contracting fraud — not uncommon in Chicago — where firms use fronts to qualify for the contracts.

In a statement the foundation said the “diversity consultant” should “demonstrate a verifiable record of implementing transparent and significant diversity and inclusion programs” and work with companies owned by minorities, women, veterans, the disabled and “individuals who identify as LGBTQ.”

The “diversity consultant” should have “a history of working with unions and engaging with underemployed populations including ex-offenders and youth to increase the pipeline of talent,” the foundation said.

The foundation is accepting applications until Oct. 13. The foundation is keeping more details of what the job will entail secret because in order to read the Request for Proposal — the central document for describing the foundation's vision for the position — a non-disclosure agreement has to be submitted to the foundation.

Groundbreaking for the Center — to cost at least \$300 million — is expected next year.

The release of the foundation's minority contracting goals in August came the day after the creation of a new nonprofit economic development organization designed to kick-start the revival in communities near the site of the future Obama Center complex.

Even if the foundation ever decided to sign some sort of community benefits deal covering just foundation jobs and contracts, it doesn't have the solo power to enforce an agreement on the multiple parties that would be part of the new non-profit or other third parties working on private development deals.