



# RFP

February 19, 2026

## **Executive Search Firm Services: Interim Executive Director, Evanston Public Library**

### Section 1 - Introduction

#### About Evanston

Evanston, Illinois is a diverse and civically engaged community located on the shores of Lake Michigan, directly north of Chicago and home to Northwestern University and major regional institutions.

#### About Evanston Public Library (EPL)

Evanston Public Library (EPL) is governed by an independent and engaged Board of Trustees and serves the community through equitable access to information, learning, and connection. EPL's 2025–2027 Strategic Plan emphasizes inclusive spaces, community engagement, lifelong learning, optimizing resources responsibly, partnerships, and sustainable growth ("BELONG" priorities).

#### Purpose of this RFP

EPL seeks proposals from qualified executive search firms with demonstrated public library executive search expertise to recruit and support the placement of an Interim Executive Director (Interim ED).



Interim ED role parameters for recruiting:

- Full-time, in-person, based in Evanston, IL
- Interim appointment expected to be 18–24 months, with potential extension based on organizational needs and mutual agreement, as well as the opportunity to apply for the permanent role when posted
- EPL is flexible on employment structure with the recruited Interim Executive Director – e.g., EPL/City payroll or third-party payroll/contract arrangement

Important: This procurement is for a search firm. The selected firm is not expected to resolve operational, facility, or labor issues directly; the firm’s role is to run a fair, equity-oriented, effective search and present a strong finalist slate on an accelerated timeline.

## Section 2 - Strong Candidates

### High-Level Interim ED Candidate Profile

EPL is seeking an Interim ED who can provide stable, credible leadership during a transition period, while maintaining excellent public service, advancing EPL’s strategic priorities, and supporting a respectful workplace with clear expectations and accountability.

#### A. Leadership style and interim fit

The ideal Interim ED is:

- Steady, pragmatic, and operationally disciplined
- Able to deescalate and stabilize without avoiding accountability
- Comfortable entering a complex environment, setting clarity and cadence quickly, and making timely decisions
- Skilled at communicating with a governing board and diverse stakeholders with professionalism and transparency



- Experienced in transition and change management approaches

#### B. Core competencies and experience

- A Masters of Library Science degree
- Senior executive leadership in a public library system with significant staff, budgets, and compliance requirements
- Demonstrated ability to lead and manage in unionized labor environments, including consistent supervision, performance management, and constructive labor relations
- Proven track record implementing strategy into measurable operational plans, including equity-centered service goals
- Strong external relationship management with Board, community partners, donors/foundations, and municipal stakeholders

#### C. Equity-centered leadership aligned to EPL's strategic plan

The Interim ED must:

- Lead in a manner consistent with EPL's mission, values, and Strategic Plan priorities, especially with regard to inclusive spaces, equitable access, community engagement, and nurturing partnerships.
- Demonstrate credible, practical experience advancing meaningful and outcomes-based equity through systems (e.g., hiring practices, training, service design, measurement), without inflaming tensions or engaging in performative approaches.

#### D. Facilities, safety, and welcoming public space

EPL's building must remain a safe, welcoming public space, including functioning as a community refuge/warming/cooling space when appropriate. The Interim ED must be able to:

- Provide strong oversight of facilities/operations staff and vendors to ensure safe, reliable building operations
- Establish/maintain oversight of practical operational systems (e.g., work orders, inspections, incident reporting, escalation pathways)



- Ensure operations meet applicable requirements to the letter and spirit of the law, including safety, accessibility, and public-service obligations
- Make safety-first decisions that protect patrons, staff, and EPL while preserving a welcoming environment

#### E. Interim Outcomes

Within the interim period, the Interim ED should be capable of delivering:

- Continuity of service and stable daily operations
- A predictable, professional operating cadence with clear expectations, and consistent follow-through
- Measurable progress on select strategic priorities appropriate and achievable for an interim leader
- Improved trust and clarity in key relationships with Board, staff leadership, and partners

## Section 3 - Scope of Work

### Search Firm Responsibilities: Recruitment and Process Support

The search firm will work with the EPL Board of Trustees, led by the Board President and a Board-designated search committee or designees, to support all aspects of the Interim ED search, including:

#### A. Launch and alignment (Weeks 1–2)

- Confirm the role profile and interim outcomes with EPL leadership; align on required qualifications and screening criteria
- Develop and deliver a written Search Plan with a timeline, sourcing strategy, evaluation process, candidate communications plan
- Prepare or refine recruitment materials into an “opportunity guide” or similar deliverable



- EPL will provide an updated job description separately; the firm should not require a finalized JD to begin or prepare the RFP - see Section 2 for candidate profile to get started

#### B. Sourcing and recruitment (Weeks 2–8)

- Advertise the opportunity and actively source candidates through targeted outreach and professional networks
- Build a robust pipeline and provide weekly updates to EPL point of contact on progress and funnel metrics
- Maintain consistent and professional candidate communications

#### C. Screening and assessment (Weeks 3–9)

- Conduct structured screening aligned to competencies and interim outcomes
- Provide candidate briefs for semi-finalists/finalists (e.g., strengths, risks, fit, availability, compensation expectations as known)
- Conduct reference checks at appropriate stage with EPL authorization and candidate consent

#### D. Selection support (Weeks 6–12)

- Present a strong, qualified finalist slate on an accelerated timeline
- Support interview planning and logistics (scheduling, materials preparation, consistent candidate experience)
- Support EPL through offer discussions/acceptance and start-date coordination

#### E. Training and fairness practices (required)

Consistent with best practices and EPL's expectations, proposers must include:

- Training/briefing for all interview participants (maximum of 12) on structured interviewing and bias mitigation
- Standardized interview guides and evaluation scorecards (firm-provided or co-developed)



F. What is out of scope

The search firm is not being retained to:

- Serve as interim management
- Conduct workplace investigations or mediate labor disputes
- Provide legal advice or serve as EPL's HR department

## Section 4 - Project Schedule

EPL has released this RFP on February 19, 2026 and seeks to have an Interim Executive Director selected within 90 days, with a target selection date of June 20, 2026.

### RFP Schedule/Search Firm Procurement

Date	Action
Thu, Feb 19, 2026	RFP issued
Fri, Mar 6, 2026 (5:00 PM CT)	Proposals due
Mar 9–11, 2026	EPL reviews proposals
Mar 12–13, 2026	Finalist firm interviews (if needed)



Week of Mar 16, 2026	EPL selects firm and executes contract (target)
Week of Mar 23, 2026	Search kickoff + finalize role profile + launch sourcing (target)

### Search Execution Schedule/Interim ED Recruitment

Timeline from Kickoff	Action / Deliverables
Weeks 1–2	Confirm candidate profile; finalize Search Plan; launch outreach/posting
Weeks 3–6	Active sourcing + screening; weekly pipeline reports
Weeks 6–9	Semi-finalists/finalist slate development; candidate briefs
Weeks 9–12	Final interviews; references; selection/offer support

### Hiring Target

- Target Interim ED selected (offer accepted): by June 20, 2026
- Target start date: as soon as practicable thereafter (e.g., late June 2026), depending on candidate availability and onboarding logistics.



Dependency/best practice note: Proposers should identify what they need from the EPL Board to hit the June 20 target (e.g., standing interview blocks, decision meetings, turnaround times for feedback).

## Section 5 - Term of Contract

- Expected Interim ED appointment: 18–24 months (extendable)
- Search firm engagement term: from contract execution through candidate acceptance and start coordination (and any agreed onboarding check-ins)

Guarantee / replacement:

Proposers should specify any guarantee terms for interim placements (if offered), including whether and how the firm would support re-running the search if an interim hire departs within a defined period.

## Section 6 - Proposal Contents

Proposals should be concise but complete and include:

1. Organizational description
  - Firm background, ownership, years in business, office locations, who will staff this engagement
2. Relevant experience
  - Evidence of successful executive searches for public libraries (ED/CEO or comparable roles)
  - Interim executive placements (preferred)
  - At least 3 brief case examples similar in complexity and timeline
3. Recruitment approach
  - Sourcing strategy (where you will look, how you will recruit passives, networks used)



- Screening methodology (structured interviews, competency model, assessment approach)
  - Candidate experience and communications plan
  - How you will handle confidentiality and sensitive stakeholder dynamics
4. Equity, fairness, and evidence-based practices (required)
- Concrete steps for structured interviewing, bias mitigation, transparency, and consistency
  - How you broaden outreach and measure process quality (without relying on performative claims)
  - Any interviewer training you provide and what it covers
5. Budget / fees (Search Firm Services)
- Fee(s) and terms (flat fee/retainer/hourly/hybrid)
  - Anticipated expenses (advertising, travel, etc.)
  - Optional add-ons and pricing
  - Any assumptions needed to meet the 90-day goal
  - Candidate compensation: EPL has not set compensation; firms may provide non-binding market insights in an appendix
6. References
- At least 3 written references, ideally including public library executive searches and/or interim placements

## Section 7 - Selection Process / Evaluation Criteria

### Selection Process

- Proposals will be reviewed by EPL's Board-designated reviewers after the closing date
- EPL may invite finalist firms to interview/present their approach



- EPL anticipates selecting a firm promptly to support a 90-day search timeline

## Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Completeness and quality of response
- Demonstrated executive library search experience and results
- Ability to deliver an accelerated timeline without sacrificing rigor
- Quality of recruitment methodology (structured, evidence-based)
- Equity/fairness and transparency practices
- Strength of proposed team and project management approach
- Cost/fee clarity and reasonableness
- Written references and past performance
- Presentation and responsiveness

## Section 8 - Submission

*Due to the expedited procurement timeline, questions will not be accepted for this RFP. Offerors are responsible for submitting a proposal based on the information provided in the RFP.*

EPL reserves the right to amend this RFP, including extending submission deadlines, by written addendum posted on the EPL website.

Completed proposals should be sent via email to the Library Board Secretary, Catie Huggins: [chuggins@cityofevanston.org](mailto:chuggins@cityofevanston.org)

Subject line: "RFP – Interim ED Search Firm – [Firm Name]"

Submission window: Thursday, February 19, 2026 to Friday, March 6, 2026 at 11:59 PM CT



# RFP Scoring Matrix

## Step 1: Pass/Fail Gate

Before scoring, confirm each proposal meets these minimum requirements:

- Demonstrated experience conducting executive searches for public libraries (ED/CEO or comparable senior leadership)
- Ability to run an accelerated process (acknowledges and commits to June 20, 2026 target offer acceptance)
- Agrees role is full-time, in-person, Evanston, IL for recruited candidates
- Provides a clear fee structure and identifies any expenses
- Provides 3 written references relevant to library executive searches / interim placements
- Describes structured, bias-mitigated evaluation approach (not just aspirational language)

If any are “No,” you can mark Non-responsive or require clarification before scoring.

## Step 2: Weighted Scoring Matrix (100 points total)

Rating scale (for each criterion):

5 = Excellent (fully meets + strong evidence, low risk)

4 = Very good (meets with minor gaps)

3 = Adequate (meets baseline; addresses requirement clearly, but limited evidence/detail; moderate risk/unknowns)

2 = Weak (material gaps; higher risk)

1 = Poor (does not meet intent)



0 = Not addressed

Weighted Points = (Rating ÷ 5) × Weight

#	Criterion	Points/weight
1	Public Library Executive Search Track Record	20
2	Search Methodology & Rigor (Structured + Evidence-Based)	15
3	Equity, Fairness, Transparency Practices	15
4	Ability to Deliver Accelerated Timeline (Offer by June 20, 2026)	15
5	Candidate Quality Approach for an Interim ED	10
6	Project Team Strength & Execution Plan	10



7	Fees, Terms, and Value (Search Firm Services)	10
8	References & Reputation / Risk Profile	5
	Total	100