Improving Public Spaces

July 2024 RFP FAQs

RFP Eligibility

Q: What types of spaces qualify for this RFP? Would you consider nature centers, vacant lots, pedestrian plazas, parklets, community gardens, religious spaces, streets, etc.? What about trail segments?

A: We define public spaces as spaces that are free to the public (non-ticketed), and that are primarily operated for and open to public access. Public spaces will frequently include signage that indicates that the space is available to the public, hours may be publicly posted, and there may be right-of-way signage to guide visitors.

Public spaces that are sometimes used for private events are not excluded from our definition, while private spaces that are sometimes open to the public are excluded. We are not including right-of-way spaces like sidewalks or bus shelters. We have intentionally not established an extensive list of things that will not be eligible for funding within this program in an effort to be more inclusive, inviting and accessible to create more opportunity for you to work with us. Our fundamental purpose in doing this work is, simply, to help support things that improve the quality of life and the future prospects of communities.

There is a separate Circuit Trails objective within our Environment and Public Space program, so there will be a separate RFP for that objective to advance trails. We also recognize that there is overlap between our trails and public space objectives, so we have not explicitly excluded proposals that seek to advance Circuit Trail segments; however, we will consider that there will be future RFPs opened to advance this purpose specifically as we review all of the public space proposals.

Q: Would you consider proposals to expand existing spaces for improvement, or new building in existing public spaces?

A: Our focus on improving existing public spaces reflects the input that we received in our planning process, which emphasized the maintenance challenges that many existing public spaces in the city currently confront. Our desire is to not exacerbate that challenge with our funding, and we expect that there is ample opportunity to improve public spaces in ways that will not produce additional maintenance burdens. Notwithstanding this, we recognize that expansion and new construction in existing public space can constitute improvement by enhancing usership or allowing for an increase in visitors, and therefore we are not excluding such proposals from consideration.
Q: Would you consider funding programming or land acquisition costs for public spaces that are on land owned by the City or other entities than the applicant?

A: Yes. In the past we have funded land acquisition, particularly for well-established urban gardens and farms, and we seek to continue the preservation and stabilization of those spaces with land acquisition being one strategy. If applicable, please indicate in your proposal that the owner of the land has collaborated in and/or consented to the submission of the proposal.

Q: Can this funding be used in a community re-grant program?

A: Yes. Regranting programs and organizations that are using fiscal sponsors are eligible to apply.

Proposal Design

Q: What is the geography for this RFP?

A: This RFP will accept proposals for improving public spaces in the cities of Philadelphia and Camden.

The geographic scope for the entire EPS program can be defined as the Greater Philadelphia region. However, we are beginning our funding in the cities of Philadelphia and Camden.

Q: Why are we not looking to fund existing programming in this RFP?

A: We will be releasing an RFP to support programming in December. Please check our Upcoming Funding page for a schedule of future RFPs.

Q: WPF has stressed the importance of incorporating public feedback into projects. Will the three months of planning time require plan development as well as public outreach and incorporation of public comment?

A: Our aim is to fund projects that are informed by input from those who the project will impact and seeks to benefit. We hope adequate public outreach can occur during the planning period, if it hasn’t occurred already. Given that community collaboration is one of the criteria upon which we are evaluating proposals, this work may also extend beyond the planning period into project implementation.

Q: Will public spaces located in historically disadvantaged communities be prioritized over those located in immediate center city?

A: Yes, while also keeping an eye on all of the other criteria including how the risk of gentrification can be mitigated through the work proposed.
**Application/Proposal Budget**

Q: Is the total available ($4.5 million) an annual budget? Is there a recommended funding cap per project/organization?

A: $4.5 million is the sum total of funding available for this RFP and will cover proposals for the entire three year period. There is no recommended funding cap per project, although we expect to fund a number of projects through this RFP. Please note that we cannot fund more than 25% of any single organization’s total operating expenses, combined across all grant awards that you receive from the William Penn Foundation.

Q: Does the limit on WPF funding 25% maximum of an organization’s operating funds still apply with capital requests?

A: Yes, it applies to all projects and general operating funds, regardless of if it includes a capital expense.

Q: Is an audit required?

A: All applicants will need to provide financial information; please see pages 10-11 of the Application Template for required financial reporting information.

**General Information**

Q: Our organization may not be ready to apply this year. Will this RFP or a similar one be issued again in future years?

A: Yes, we expect to open another RFP toward this objective funding new programming in the coming years.

Q: Can an organization that is currently funded by a different WPF program or objective apply to this RFP?

A: Yes, organizations are invited to apply even if they have received funding from WPF for a different project.