

William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Accessing Federal Funding for Climate, Environmental Justice, and Infrastructure

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Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to improve quality of life for residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation’s Democracy and Civic Initiatives program was created to support collective and collaborative action towards a more engaged, participatory city and state. A full description of the Democracy and Civic Initiatives program, its goal, and all its objectives can be found on the Foundation’s website. This specific Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations to advance the following objective:

Increase the amount of funding the region accesses from national private and public sources.

Recently, the federal government has made funding available at unprecedented levels to reduce pollution; prepare for impacts of climate change such as flooding, extreme heat, and storms; and invest in essential infrastructure such as transit, utilities, and water systems. Federal and state agencies now have the responsibility to expend these funds in meaningful ways. Well-invested, these funds have the potential to greatly improve quality of life for residents across our region.

This Request for Proposals will support efforts to access to federal funding for climate, environmental justice, and infrastructure for the Philadelphia region.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways that organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective. In this RFP, we are focusing solely on efforts to access federal funding for climate, environmental justice, and infrastructure. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project designs or applicants' approach to securing such funding. For example, proposals may focus on project development, engaging technical or legal assistance, communications, or other ways to advance the objective. Proposals may seek to make change on a regionwide or more localized scale.

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should describe a compelling explanation for how their proposed work will advance the objective above. This RFP seeks project proposals that will advance this objective and make tangible improvements in the quality of life for residents of the region. The specific criteria that will be used to assess all proposals can be found on page 6-7 of this document.

Why is the Foundation using a Request for Proposals to advance this objective?

The Foundation has chosen to advance this objective using a Request for Proposals for several reasons. First, we believe that stakeholders across the region have a great deal of expertise and experience that can be supported to make progress on an objective that we heard was important to communities in our region. We want to hear about the impactful projects that are underway or could get underway and need funding. Second, we want to be as transparent as possible about the opportunity for non-profit organizations in the region to access funding for work to advance this objective. Third, we heard from applicants and grantees in the past that our grant application process was overly burdensome, had unpredictable timelines, and did not provide sufficient information about the funding availability or the criteria used in selecting grantees. Fourth, we heard that applicants wanted an opportunity to show Foundation staff their work, not just tell them about it. The RFP process, including site visits as described below, is part of our effort to address all of this important feedback and to align with the Foundation's grantmaking values (as detailed on our website).

Background

The federal government has recently made billions of dollars available for projects and programs that reduce climate pollution, promote clean energy, increase climate resilience, address environmental justice issues, and improve essential infrastructure via the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Federal funding is available in the form of grants, tax incentives, rebates, and financing. Many funds fall within the [Justice40](#) Initiative, which set a goal for 40% of the benefits of certain federal investments to flow to communities “marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.”

But meeting federal funding requirements is notoriously difficult, and special attention is required to ensure that communities most in need of funding can receive it. William Penn Foundation has already made several grants to support organizations working to drawdown federal funding ([more information available here](#)). We are now issuing this RFP to assist a greater number of organizations.

~\$1.2 trillion

2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding for transportation, energy, water systems, and more.¹

~\$370 billion

2022 Inflation Reduction Act funding for climate resilience, clean energy, and conservation.²



Photo courtesy of Solar States

1 [Forbes](#)

2 [White House Inflation Reduction Act Guidebook](#)

Opportunity Overview

WPF seeks to support efforts to access available federal funding for climate, environmental justice, and infrastructure for the Philadelphia region (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties). In this RFP, “accessing” funding means that federal dollars have been successfully received by an entity located within the region who will spend the funds to benefit regional communities.

We are interested in prioritizing work that is focused on benefitting communities most vulnerable to climate change, environmental burdens, and/or the impacts of inadequate infrastructure.

We know that barriers to securing federal funding include but are not limited to stakeholder coordination, communications, and community engagement; project development (including concept paper development and technical analysis); community benefits agreement/plan development; grant writing; match requirements; bridge expenses for reimbursable grants and tax credits; legal guidance; tax guidance; and challenges with meeting federal procurement, compliance, and grants administration requirements. We are interested in helping the region address these and other barriers to accessing funds.

We also know there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to address barriers or to otherwise advance the goal of securing federal climate, environmental justice, and infrastructure funding for the region. All proposals that meet the criteria described on pages 6-7 are encouraged to apply.

We are requesting proposals for projects that will last up to two years. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

WPF has allocated up to \$3.5 million to award to organizations who respond to this RFP. There is no minimum that organizations may request. The maximum that organizations can receive from WPF through this RFP is \$1,000,000. However, most grants will likely be smaller. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the additional federal funding that is likely to be accessed.

WPF is committed to collaborating with other funders to help the region access funding. As such, we plan to share proposals with funding partners who are working to advance this same issue. One such funder is the [Green Family Foundation](#), which is focused on drawing down and equitably deploying available federal climate funding specifically. The Green Family Foundation is operating with an invitation-only grant application process, but will review proposals submitted through this RFP. Please notify us if you do not wish us to share your proposal with the Green Family Foundation and other funders.

Eligibility

Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible to apply. For-profit entities are **not** eligible to apply for funding.

Applicants do not need to be physically located in the Philadelphia region (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties) but the work proposed must aim to access federal funding for the Philadelphia region.

Organizations with a current WPF grant that is funding work related to this RFP are not eligible to apply for more funding for the same project(s).

Review Criteria

Proposals will be judged on the criteria below. Applicants should make every effort to address these criteria in their narrative responses to the application questions.

All proposals should clearly state the specific sources, and amounts, of federal funding for climate, environmental justice, and/or infrastructure that have the potential to be accessed with WPF support. The IJA and IRA are not the only sources of federal climate, environmental justice, and infrastructure funding that applicants can be working to access.

Understanding of Funding Context			
Absent	Marginal	Developing	Strong
No understanding of funding landscape; no plan for learning about it.	Limited understanding of and experience working within funding landscape.	Ongoing, intentional efforts to understand funding landscape and some experience working within it or in a similar setting.	Strong knowledge of funding landscape and deep experience working within it are clearly shaping proposed work.
Equity			
Absent	Marginal	Developing	Strong
No plan to prioritize benefits or ensure equitable access to funding for communities affected by economic inequality, racial discrimination, and/or other forms of injustice.	Limited consideration of equitable funding access or benefits for communities affected by economic inequality, racial discrimination, and/or other forms of injustice.	Proposed project reflects a priority on equitable funding access and/or benefits for communities affected by economic inequality, racial discrimination, and/or other forms of injustice. Impact likely will not extend beyond the project timeline.	Proposed project seeks to improve the likelihood that communities affected by economic inequality, racial discrimination, and/or other forms of injustice will access and/or benefit from funding into the future (beyond the project timeline).

Organizational Capacity and Project Feasibility			
Absent	Marginal	Developing	Strong
No evidence of a plan, resources, staffing, leadership, and/or partnerships necessary to achieve project's goals.	Some elements of a plan, resources, staffing, leadership, and partnerships are in place, but path to fill gaps is vague or nonexistent.	Evidence of a realistic plan and leadership, and some resources, staffing, and partnerships. There is a credible path to fill remaining gaps.	Evidence that a realistic plan, leadership, resources, staffing, and partnerships are in place to achieve project goals; history of successful implementation of similar work.
Potential for Impact			
Absent	Marginal	Developing	Strong
A grant from WPF would not help access <u>additional</u> funding for the region (i.e., beyond what has already been accessed <u>and</u> beyond what an organization could access without a WPF grant).	A grant from WPF could access limited additional funding for the region OR there is no evidence to suggest that federal funding would be successfully implemented.	A grant from WPF is likely to help access meaningful additional funding for the region, and there is evidence to suggest that federal funding will be successfully implemented, if awarded, and that it will tangibly benefit residents' quality of life.	A grant from WPF is very likely to help access significant additional funding for the region, and there is strong evidence to suggest that federal funding will be successfully implemented, if awarded, and that it will tangibly benefit residents' quality of life.

Additional considerations:

Budget	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the expected results.
Time-Sensitivity	Proposals concerning a time-sensitive opportunity to access funding will be more competitive, as long as they meet all other criteria, especially project feasibility. However, time sensitivity is not a requirement.
Letters of Support	Proposals that include strong letters of support from partners will receive additional consideration.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that advance the goal of this RFP <i>and</i> contribute to one or more other WPF objectives will be more competitive, as long as they meet all other criteria. However, advancing other WPF objectives is not a requirement.

Learning and Evaluation

Grantees will be expected to complete a brief written report each year describing how they have made progress toward the objective above and what they have learned during the year.

In addition, organizations funded through this RFP will be convened to build networks among those advancing a common objective, to share learning and best practices, and to identify ways in which progress could be enhanced. Grantees will help to determine the frequency, content, and specific goals of convening. The overhead funding included with any awarded grants is, in part, meant to help subsidize staff participation in the Learning Community.

WPF will measure the overarching impact of this group of grants by assessing how much funding the WPF-supported projects have helped bring to the region and how those funds have been, or will be, invested.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an informational webinar on **Thursday, July 11, 2024 at 10:00AM EST.**

Register for the webinar at <https://lu.ma/williampenfoundation>

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to two years of funding. Organizations are encouraged to build on their existing programs, using WPF funding to supplement or enhance those efforts.

Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any fees to partner organizations or consultants. This information can be provided in the proposal narrative.

Except in rare circumstances, total funding from WPF should not exceed 25% of a participating organization's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, and implementation, are eligible for funding.

The Application Process

The application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>. Submit your application by 5:00PM EST on **August 1, 2024**. A WPF team will review all proposals and will notify applicants if they have been selected to move forward in the review process. **To download a working copy of the application to draft responses, please [click here](#).**

Selected organizations will take part in a site visit with WPF staff so that the Foundation can learn more about applicants' work. Site visits will last no more than two hours. We ask that organizations use this time to introduce key staff working on the proposed project, to show WPF staff where the work will take place, and to elevate the voices of the potential beneficiaries of the proposed project. Based on a combination of the written materials and the learning from the site visit, **a final slate of organizations** will be recommended to the WPF Board for consideration of their proposals.

This request or any subsequent response does not commit William Penn Foundation or the responding organization to any future funding or engagement. If you have any questions, contact Cara Ferrentino at cferrentino@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

July 1, 2024

Proposal submission period opens.

July 11, 2024

Informational Webinar (see previous page)

August 1, 2024

Proposals due by 5:00PM EST

August 16, 2024

Select applicants notified that their proposals have been chosen for further consideration and a site visit. Other applicants will be notified that their proposals are not advancing in the process.

August 19 – September 6, 2024

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

October 25, 2024

WPF Board reviews selected proposals.

November 2024

Project implementation can begin.