

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Improving Public Spaces in the Greater Philadelphia Region

Published July 2024

Due August 1, 2024

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Introduction

The William Penn Foundation has a long history of investing in efforts to improve environmental conditions for residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation’s Environment and Public Space program was created to help improve and protect the natural and built environment in communities around the region. A full description of the 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 advance the following objective:

By 2035, help to improve at least 100 existing public spaces that support recreation, refuge, and social interaction.

Through conversations with residents across the region, we learned that the highest priority for communities is to ensure public spaces are well taken care of for the current and future generations. The Foundation’s objective to improve our existing public spaces is in direct response to that feedback. We strive to make our already loved public spaces safer, cleaner, better programmed, and more welcoming than ever before.

The Foundation recognizes there are many ways organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project designs or applicants' approach to addressing this issue. For example, proposals may focus on direct service, capital investments, operational or systems change, outreach and education, or other ways to advance the objective. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or may seek to make change on a citywide scale.

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should provide 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 Philadelphia. The specific criteria that will be used to assess all proposals can be found on pages 8-9 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 secure 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).

This RFP seeks project proposals that will advance this objective and make tangible improvements in the quality of life for residents of Philadelphia.

Background

The William Penn Foundation has a long history of making grants to support public spaces that are accessible to the public at no cost and that positively impact our communities.

Research confirms that public and community spaces provide a wide range of benefits from strengthening social relationships and community connections to supporting physical and mental health and wellbeing. Public spaces can also strengthen community resilience in the face of climate change and other environmental impacts. From parks and gardens to recreation and community centers, public spaces are integral to the fabric of our neighborhoods and society.

Many of Philadelphia’s public spaces have deferred maintenance needs that reduce usership, undermine operational efficiency and create unsafe conditions. Poorly maintained public spaces can increase fear of crime, depress neighborhood property values, and signal to residents that they are not valued, among other adverse effects.

For these reasons stakeholders emphasized to us the importance of prioritizing improvements to existing public spaces over funding new public spaces that might then fall into disrepair. There is a large opportunity to fund capital, operational, and programmatic improvements that will lead to the repairs, ongoing maintenance, and activation of these public spaces.

400+

The number of neighborhood parks, recreation centers, and libraries in Philadelphia



Opportunity Overview

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) aims to support efforts that will contribute to public space improvements in a variety of ways, including by increasing activation and stewardship, expanding and diversifying usership, and improving the quality of facilities. We hope to fund improvements that will help to produce safer, better maintained, more active, welcoming, and higher-quality public spaces.

Public spaces are defined by WPF as those that are managed, free, and open to the public. Public spaces include but are not limited to urban gardens, urban farms, parks, parklets, recreation centers, libraries, and community centers. The Foundation does not include right-of-way areas like sidewalks or bus shelters as eligible for public space improvement funding.

Grants made through this RFP will focus on the need for better and more equitable improvements through capital investments, maintenance, operations, and programming of existing public and community spaces. We are also eager to support work focused on improving the long-term stewardship of existing public spaces through investments in the physical site and/or at an organizational level through staffing, governance, and personal changes.

We are requesting proposals for one to three-year projects to improve public spaces in Philadelphia. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

Organizations that propose projects in partnership with other applicants will be considered on their individual merits. However, the Foundation recognizes that making significant progress on the objective is difficult and believes that the most competitive proposals are likely to be those that include robust partnerships that leverage complementary strengths, resources, and expertise.

Furthermore, the Foundation recognizes that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. All proposals that meet the review criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has \$4.5 million available to advance this objective currently. There is no minimum or maximum that organizations may request but we aim to attract and fund a range of projects. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

At least one third of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that have budgets under \$1 million per year and/or are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion. Projects that demonstrate a diversity of funding sources will also be more strongly considered.

For applicants requesting funding for capital improvements: WPF works with [Green Building United](#) to provide optional, free, hands-on technical assistance (TA) to grantees to ensure that sustainability and climate resilience are

factored into capital projects funded by WPF. Free TA is available to grantees in the planning, design, or early construction phases of their projects. TA can help organizations reduce operational costs, including energy costs; prepare for extreme weather; access financial incentives; and meet other sustainability goals. To date, support has included one-on-one discussions, design reviews with relevant professionals, and facilitated site visits to peer organizations who have addressed similar sustainability/resilience challenges. Organizations that are selected to advance beyond the written proposal stage of the review process will have the opportunity to learn more about free TA from Green Building United during their site visit with WPF staff.

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.

Proposed projects must occur in the Philadelphia or Camden.

The chart below highlights examples of improvements that may be considered. Note this chart is offered as a guide and is not an exhaustive list of what may be considered. To be transparent, we have also provided a list of work that is not eligible for funding. We look forward to and invite creative solutions to improving spaces that are proposed by communities.

Type of Improvements	Effect on the Space	Not Eligible for Funding
Capital Investment	Provide additional space or area to expand programming, refuge, expression, and/or interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New buildings, or structures in areas that were not existing public spaces. - New public spaces unconnected to existing ones.
Maintenance	Create higher levels of safety, usability and access that can be sustained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repairs that are not designed to be long-lasting.
Operational	Strengthen an organization and staff positions responsible for improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Funding for organizational positions that are not necessary to enable the proposed improvement.
Programmatic	Increase usership in an underutilized space, attract a new user group, and/or activate a public space in a new way for the first time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Funding to continue established programs in already activated spaces. Funding for existing programming will be available through a separate RFP to be released at the end of 2024.
Other	We are eager to hear your ideas of other ways to improve public spaces that have not been captured by us. We invite creativity, collaboration, and innovation!	

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.

Alignment with Objective			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Conveys no meaningful connection to any EPS objectives.	Would make an indirect and marginal or uncertain contribution to advancing an EPS objective.	Would make an indirect but important contribution to advancing EPS objective.	Would make a direct contribution to advancing EPS objective.
Beneficiaries			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not identify expected beneficiaries of the project.	Identified beneficiaries of the project do not include prioritized communities.	Identifies prioritized beneficiaries but without precision.	Precisely identifies prioritized community/communities that are expected to benefit from the project.
Meaningful Community Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful engagement of intended beneficiaries.	Cursory engagement of intended beneficiaries.	Meaningful engagement of intended beneficiaries in development of proposal or implementation of project.	Meaningful engagement of intended beneficiaries in development of proposal and implementation of project.
Partnership and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address partnerships that will be necessary for success.	Identified relevant partners but has not adequately incorporated collaboration with those partners into the proposal.	Identifies relevant partners and describes collaboration with those partners.	Identifies relevant partners and provides evidence of partners' commitment to fulfilling the roles described.
Scientific and Technical Awareness			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No apparent awareness of relevant scientific and technical aspects of the project.	Limited awareness of some of the relevant scientific and technical aspects of the project.	Developing awareness of relevant scientific and technical aspects of the project.	Detailed awareness of relevant scientific and technical aspects of the project.

Sustainability and Maintenance			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address maintenance and sustainability of the proposed project.	Partially address maintenance or sustainability but not both.	Partially address maintenance and sustainability of the proposed project.	Fully address maintenance and sustainability of the proposed project.
← <i>Emergent, Developing, or Strong Required</i> →			
Strategic Clarity			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Imprecise definition of success and unclear strategy for achieving objectives.	Clear definition of success, but unclear or questionable strategy for achieving objectives.	Precise definition of success and clear strategy for achieving objectives but does not address expected consequences for intended beneficiaries.	Precise definition of success, persuasive strategy for achieving objectives, and clear expectations of intended consequences of project for beneficiaries.
← <i>Developing or Strong Required</i> →			
Gentrification			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address gentrification risks of proposed project.	Acknowledges gentrification risks but includes no strategy for mitigating or minimizing them.	Acknowledges gentrification risks and has a limited strategy for mitigating or minimizing them.	Includes strategy to minimize and mitigate gentrification risks.
← <i>Strong Required</i> →			

Additional expectations and considerations:

Funding for Capital Improvements	Applicants requesting funding for capital improvements should identify how sustainability and/or climate resiliency has been considered and/or incorporated into their project design.
Organizational Resources and Capacity	Has an implementation plan that includes existing and new staff, professional development, technology, data management, and other agency resources to deliver the proposed services.
Partnership	Proposals that describe intentional collaboration with other applicants will be most competitive.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to other WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.

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 as a result of this RFP will be convened in a Learning Community 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 the Learning Community. The overhead funding included with any awarded grants is, in part, meant to help subsidize staff participation in the Learning Community.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an informational webinar on **Tuesday, July 9, 2024 at 1:00PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets can cover up to three years of funding and may include up to three months for planning.

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, consultants, staffing, and implementation, are eligible for funding.

In rare cases, it is possible that *everything* an organization does is focused on advancing the specific objective stated above. If that is the case, an organization may be eligible for general operating, rather than project support. If you believe that to be the case, please contact the Program Officer named below to discuss further.

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 5pm 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 applicants will take part in a site visit with WPF staff so that the Foundation can learn more about applicants' work. Site visits will be approximately two hours in duration. 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 Jazmine da Costa at jdacosta@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

July 1, 2024

Proposal submission period opens

July 9, 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 review selected proposals

November 2024

Project implementation can begin