

William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Arts and Culture Capital Support

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William Penn Foundation
Two Logan Square, Suite 1100
100 North 18th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
williampennfoundation.org



Photo Credit: Halkin Mason

Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to create a vibrant, dynamic, and accessible arts and culture sector that positively impacts the lives of residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation’s Arts and Culture program was created to expand access to diverse, inclusive, and high-quality arts and culture experiences. A full description of the Arts and Culture program, its goals, 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:

Improve existing arts and culture spaces to improve access to high-quality arts and culture experiences for people with disabilities and those who have been most affected by economic inequity, racial discrimination, or other forms of injustice.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways that organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project designs or applicants' approach to advancing this objective. A project may, for example, focus on universal or human-centered design, safety and accessibility improvements, public and community use, improvements necessary to maintain or improve the function of the space, or other ways to advance the objective. All projects must be designed to provide greater access to arts and culture experiences that are equitable and inclusive. Proposals must focus on existing spaces owned by, or with long-term leases held by, organizations with strong artistic, cultural, and civic value to the region. To be eligible for this funding, an organization must have received a William Penn Foundation grant within the past 10 years, as we seek to sustain the viability of past investments. However, recipients of capital funding within the last 3 years are ineligible in order to make this opportunity available to more organizations.

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should describe a compelling explanation for how their proposed work will advance the objective above. The specific criteria that will be used to assess all proposals can be found on pages 7-8 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 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 support improvements to existing physical spaces in which arts and culture organizations provide accessible, equitable, and inclusive experiences.

Background

Arts and culture spaces play a pivotal role in strengthening the social and cultural fabric of our communities. These spaces are integral to the overall artistic programming experiences that provide Philadelphians with opportunities for civic engagement and deep community connections, creative expression, generate well-being, affirm cultural or community identity, and contribute to the vitality, economy, and livability of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. Well-designed, well-maintained spaces can elevate new approaches to programming, engagement, and business models leading to greater resilience and growth in the arts and culture sector. To provide high-quality arts and culture experiences in the Philadelphia region, there is also a great need for accessible spaces and places that are inclusive of communities, audiences and artists who have traditionally not been reflected due to economic inequity, social injustice, or discrimination.

Audience Perspectives

89.8% of arts and culture attendees agree the venue and experience inspire a sense of pride in their neighborhood or community.

80.7% of arts and culture attendees agree that the venue is an important pillar within their community.¹



¹ Vinh, K (2024). [Arts, Culture & Economic Prosperity: Greater Philadelphia](#). Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance

Opportunity Overview

WPF would like to support projects that improve existing arts and culture spaces to connect more Philadelphians to high-quality arts and culture experiences. We are most interested in prioritizing projects that make it possible for all Philadelphians, including people with disabilities and those who have been most affected by economic inequity, racial discrimination, or other forms of injustice to benefit from high-quality arts and culture experiences—in spaces that are designed and equipped to be safe, welcoming, and engaging. We are most interested in prioritizing spaces that are integral to the overall arts and culture experience, where participants can see themselves and their communities, and develop a sense of belonging.

We are requesting proposals for 1-3-year projects to address direct capital improvement of a space that is currently owned by the applicant, or improvement for a space under long-term lease by the applicant. Projects may also address one-time major equipment purchases, including but not limited to technology, equipment to support artistic production and presentation, safety, and accessibility. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

All proposals that meet the criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has a total of \$5 million available to advance this objective at this time. We aim to consider a range of projects. There is no minimum or maximum that organizations may request but the most competitive proposals will likely be those with total requests under \$750,000 and spaces owned by the organization. The grant amount requested should be proportionate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

At least \$1 million of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that have budgets under \$2 million per year and are led by and/or serving individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion.

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. Applicants must have received a William Penn Foundation grant within the past 10 years. Applicants must currently own their proposed physical space; or must hold a long-term lease for a minimum of the next 8 years.

Eligible organizations include:

- **Arts and culture organizations:** organizations with a mission that centers on the creation, performance, and/or presentation of artistic and cultural programs and practices that are inclusive, equitable and have social impact.
- **Arts education organizations:** community art schools, community youth arts organizations, creative youth development organizations that work to make high-quality arts education accessible for youth ages 5-18.

The majority of our funding will be awarded to projects in the City of Philadelphia. However, projects in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties, and the City of Camden, NJ will also be considered.

Please note:

The Foundation will not fund a new capital project if there is an active capital project underway supported through a current William Penn Foundation grant, or if the organization has received capital funding from the Foundation within the last 3 years.

Definition of Terms

Arts and culture space	Dedicated space designed to support creative disciplines and cultural practices including dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, media arts, music, museum, musical theater, opera, multidisciplinary arts, theater, and visual arts.
High-quality	Applies artistic excellence and knowledge to create experiences that are informed by the needs, desires, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries.
Long-term lease	A long-term commercial lease can be 3-10 years or more depending on the industry. For the purposes of this RFP, at least eight years remaining on a lease agreement is required.
Universal and human-centered design	Universal design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of age, size, or ability. Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem solving that engages the people for whom a space or object is being developed to create results that will meet their needs and priorities.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be judged on the following criteria. **Applicants should address these criteria in their narrative responses to the application questions.**

Artistic or Cultural Practice			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No impact or influence on artistic field.	Limited impact on or influence on artistic field.	Considerable influence on the artistic field and region.	Work is essential to the artistic field, community, or region.
			← Strong Required →
Organizational Strength			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Vague or unformed plan for future operations.	Stable financial health with limited plan to develop resources for expanded program/ activity.	Stable financial health with moderately clear approach to business model, gaps in budget and resources.	Strong financial health, equipped with business model, necessary assets, and resources to sustain expanded program/ activity.
			← Strong Required →
Achievability			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Unrealistic project plan, budget, and/or resources for expected results.	Limited plan, misaligned, or unclear alignment with budget and resources.	Moderately clear project plan, gaps in fund development and resources.	A detailed project plan including a clear project budget, financing, construction documents, and an implementation schedule.
			← Strong Required →
Orientation to Racial Equity, Economic Inclusion, and Accessibility for People with Disabilities			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Vague or non-existent goals.	Limited goals focused on inclusion and access.	Clearly articulated approach to make artistic and cultural work inclusive and accessible.	Project is designed with a goal to address structural inequities of access and opportunity.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	
Community/People-Centered Practice			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Minimal evidence of community input.	Project consulted with community for some activities.	Project is building on community relationships and collaborative practices.	Project is informed by long-standing history of inclusive and community-informed practices.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	

Promotes Stewardship of Existing Cultural Assets			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Not an existing cultural asset.	Is an existing cultural asset but project does not represent an investment in the existing asset; but the project will benefit the institution overall.	Represents a partial or modest investment in an existing cultural asset and the project will benefit the institution overall.	Represents an important enhancement of or reinvestment in an existing cultural institution.
Leverages a Prior Foundation Investment			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No prior WPF investment.	Historic but no recent WPF investment.	Recent* but modest WPF investment.	Recent* major WPF investment.

* Within past 10 years

Additional expectations:

Intended Beneficiaries	Proposal identifies and describes a well-defined group or community that the project aims to engage and positively impact.
Articulated Benefits	Proposal articulates the positive impact(s) it will have on its community and for the institution/agency.
Project Development	If part of a larger capital effort, proposal articulates a clear understanding of the project's priority and timeline in relation to a broader plan.
Budget	Reasonable and informed cost assessments to allocate adequate resources for the project are described and an active fund development plan underway.
Contribution to other strategic objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and contribute to other Arts and Culture or WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.

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.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an informational webinar on **Tuesday, September 24, 2024, at 1 PM EST.**

Register for the webinar at <https://lu.ma/william penn foundation>.

Budget

Project budgets may be 1-3-years in length to support completion of a project within a period not to exceed 3 years. Organizations are encouraged to build on their existing capital plans, 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 applicant organization's total operating budget.

Aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community input, staffing, and implementation, are eligible for funding.

Application Process

Before you apply, please review your responses to the four questions below. If you can confidently answer “yes” to all the questions, this funding opportunity may be relevant to you. If you respond “no” to any of the questions, this opportunity is not a good match for your program, and you should not apply.

	YES	NO
Does your project improve access to, and quality of, an existing arts and culture space?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has your organization received funding from the William Penn Foundation in the past 10 years, and does not have an active capital project being funded by the Foundation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you own or have at least 8 years remaining on a long-term lease for your space?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your space in the cities of Philadelphia or Camden, or Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please also review all the criteria on pages 7-8 and make sure that your program aligns with those.

If you answered “yes” to all of the questions just above and meet the stated criteria, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wfp.my.site.com/grantee>. Submit your application by **October 25, 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 review the application questions and 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 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 projects** will be recommended to the WPF Board for consideration of their proposal.

This request or any subsequent response does not commit William Penn Foundation or the responding organization to any future funding or engagement.

Timeline

September 18, 2024

Proposal submission period opens

September 24, 2024

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

October 25, 2024

Proposals due by 5:00PM EST

November 6-8, 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.

November 11–November 27, 2024

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

January 31, 2025

WPF Board review selected proposals

February 2025

Project implementation can begin

If you have any questions, contact Program Director Barbara Wong at bwong@williampennfoundation.org

