

William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Supporting Outdoor Programming

Published December 9, 2024

Due January 31, 2025

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



Photo: Troy Bynum/TB Wildlife Photography

Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to improve environmental conditions for residents of Greater Philadelphia. 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 its objectives can be found on the Foundation’s website. This Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations to advance the following objective, which was developed in consultation with many stakeholders around the region:

By 2035, support 50,000 participant program days* of park, trail, and water programming.

* Participant Program Day = Number of Participants x Program Duration in Days

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways that organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective. With that understanding, this RFP imposes few limitations on the approach that applicants may take. Projects must take place in and primarily serve residents of the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden and may focus on direct service, policy or system 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. 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 this important feedback and to align with the Foundation's grantmaking values (as detailed on our website).

This RFP seeks project proposals that will help to equitably activate parks, trails, and water in Philadelphia and Camden.

Background

Research demonstrates that time in nature provides a multitude of benefits to people, including improved health, well-being, and cognition.¹ Most people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income, want to be able to access and enjoy the outdoors. Yet barriers - including safety concerns, lack of inviting spaces or activities, and time and economic pressures - often limit access to the benefits of the outdoors, especially among people of color and economically disadvantaged people.² Programs that activate parks, trails, and water can help to lower some of these barriers by fostering a sense of safety, belonging, and joy among participants. In turn, they can enhance the value of these spaces as environmental assets within a community and engender a feeling of connection and ownership of these spaces.

We recognize that there are many ways that organizations and communities can increase participation opportunities for park, trail, and water programming. We are seeking to support projects and programs that organizations working in Philadelphia and Camden believe will be most effective in making progress on the objective above. There are few limitations on a project's approach to advancing the objective, as long as it is designed to advance opportunities for people in the cities of Philadelphia and Camden to have equitable access to high-quality outdoor programs.

In Pennsylvania, outdoor recreation contributed \$18.9 billion to Pennsylvania's economy in 2023, accounting for 168,000 jobs.³

Photo: Neighborhood Bike Works



¹ [Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence - PMC](#)

² [Equity-of-Access-to-Trails-Market-Research-Fall-2020.pdf](#)

³ [Bureau of Economic Analysis – Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Data 2023](#)

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation would like to invest in efforts that support park, trail, and water programming in the cities of Philadelphia and Camden. This RFP will prioritize projects that serve communities that have experienced the greatest barriers to accessing the benefits of the outdoors.

Possible efforts may include nature-based programming that draws more people to experience public spaces, to enjoy recreational opportunities with fellow community members, and to build an affinity for these spaces. Programs may be led by a facilitator (e.g., trained staff or community members) or self-guided. The most important thing is that these are programs that are shaped and desired by community members and expand opportunities for them to enjoy the outdoors. All programs must be operated at no cost to participants.

In addition to proposals for direct support of programming, we also invite proposals that will indirectly support programming such as communications (e.g., program-related marketing or public campaigns to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors) or advocacy that makes free outdoor programming more accessible.

The following will not be eligible for funding:

- Capital projects.
- Competitive sports programs.
- Programs in which participants are spectators, audiences, or workers.

We are requesting proposals for **up to three years** for projects that support participation in park, trail, and water programs. 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 encourages organizations to include partnerships that leverage complementary strengths, resources, and expertise to reach proposed goals.

As noted above, 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 criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has **\$2.5 million** available to advance this objective through this RFP. WPF values diverse approaches from various organizations and communities to address the objective. We aim to attract and fund a range of projects. There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that projects may request, but the most competitive proposals will likely be those with total grant requests under \$400,000 (over 3 years). The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the scope of the project and the project's contribution to the overall objective.

Eligibility

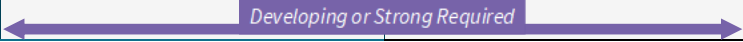
Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible to apply.

Proposed program beneficiaries and program locations must be in the cities of Philadelphia or Camden. Projects that are not direct service, such as advocacy or communications, may focus on a wider geographic scale but must have significant projected impact in Philadelphia and/or Camden.

Review Criteria

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

Alignment with Objective			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Conveys no meaningful connection to the RFP objective.	Would make a marginal and/or uncertain contribution to advancing the RFP objective.	Proposed work would make a clear contribution to advancing the RFP objective.	Proposed work would make a clear and major contribution to advancing the RFP objective.
Beneficiaries			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not identify expected beneficiaries of the project.	Identified beneficiaries of the project do not include prioritized communities.	Project beneficiaries are identified, include prioritized communities, and will significantly benefit from the proposed work.	Project beneficiaries are identified, include prioritized communities, and will receive significant and major benefits from the proposed work.
Meaningful Community Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful engagement of community in preparation of proposal or implementation of proposed work.	Limited engagement of community in preparation of proposal or implementation of proposed work.	Meaningful engagement of community in development of proposal or implementation of project.	Robust and sustained engagement of community in preparation of proposal and implementation of proposed work.
Partnership and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address partnerships that will be necessary for success.	Identified relevant partners but does not describe the role that partners will play in the proposed work.	Identifies relevant partners and fully describes collaboration with those partners.	Identifies relevant partners, fully describes the role that partners will play in the proposed work, and provides evidence of partners' commitment to fulfilling the roles described such as through an included letter of support.
Organizational Capacity			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Insufficient evidence of leadership, resources, staffing, partnerships, and/or experience necessary to achieve project goals.	Evidence of leadership, resources, staffing and/or partnerships, but insufficient evidence of ability to successfully implement work of the type being proposed.	Evidence of leadership, resources, staffing and partnerships, and some experience with successful implementation of the type of work being proposed.	Evidence of all necessary leadership, resources, staffing, and partnerships in place to achieve project goal. Applicant and/or partners also have extensive experience with successful implementation of the type of work being proposed.

Project Design and Feasibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not provide a clear, specific, or realistic approach to the work. Project outcomes and success are not clear and well-defined.	Provides a clear approach to the work, but some aspects of the approach are vague or seem unrealistic. Project outcomes are defined, but are of uncertain achievability, based on the details provided.	Provides a clear approach to the work and successful outcomes are defined and achievable. Some aspects of the project design may require further clarification to assess feasibility.	Provides a clear approach to the work that describes the organizational capacity to carry out the proposed project, a feasible plan to implement the work, and a plan to track project outcomes and the impact on the RFP objective.
			

Additional expectations and considerations:

Equity	Proposals that produce greatest benefit for people who seek outdoor experience but have most often lacked opportunities will be the most competitive (including but not limited to communities of color and economically disadvantaged people).
Program Outcomes	Project aims to build an affinity for parks, trails, and/or water among participants.
Demonstration of Need	Proposals should clearly define the need or demand for the proposed project (e.g., waitlist for program, community request).
Budget	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to other 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 through 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 optional informational webinar on **Friday, December 13, 2024 at 11:00 AM EST.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover **up to three years** of funding.

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 an applicant's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, materials and equipment, community engagement, staffing, and implementation, are eligible for funding. Capital expenses are not eligible for funding.

Application Process

Before you apply, please review the four questions below. If you can confidently answer “yes” to 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 project, and you should not apply.

	YES	NO
Will your project result in a significant number of participant program days of park, trail, and/or water programming?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will your program primarily provide opportunities to residents of the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will your programming take place in the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your programming provided at no charge to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

If you answered “yes” to all of the questions above and meet the stated criteria, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpcf.my.site.com/grantee>. Submit your application by **5:00PM EST on January 31, 2025**. 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 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 Michele Perch at mperch@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

December 9, 2024

Proposal submission period opens.

December 13, 2024

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

January 31, 2025

Proposals due by 5:00PM EST

February 12-14, 2025

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.

February 17- March 7, 2025

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

April 25, 2025

WPF Board review selected proposals.

May 2025

Project implementation can begin.