

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Increasing Voter Participation

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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 toward a more engaged, participatory city and state. A full description of the Democracy and Civic Initiatives program, its goal, and all of 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:

In Philadelphia’s 2031 general election, voter turnout increases, compared to 31% in 2023. In Pennsylvania’s 2032 presidential election, the gap in voter turnout rates between voters of color and white voters decreases compared to the gap in 2024.

In contrast to relatively high voter turnout in recent high-profile presidential elections, most state and local elections see low levels of voter engagement. Key nonpartisan stakeholders have told us that their work to increase voter participation faces many challenges, including skepticism about the value of voting, inaccessible election processes, incorrect or misleading information about voting, and a lack of consistent funding for trusted messengers to do the year-round outreach and education that would enable citizens to overcome these and other barriers. This RFP seeks to address these challenges by funding projects that will reach eligible voters currently underrepresented in the electorate.

The Foundation recognizes that increasing voter participation and reducing the racial gap in voter turnout requires a variety of strategies, including (but not limited to) nonpartisan outreach, organizing, voter education, advocacy, research, polling, communications, and/or journalism. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project design or applicants' approach to improving voter turnout. However, as a private foundation, we cannot earmark funds for voter registration. **Voter registration activities are not eligible for funding** through this RFP.

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 6 and 7 of this document.

Please note: This is the first of two RFPs in the next 12 months seeking to increase voter participation. There will be an additional RFP focused on voter participation available in June of 2025.

This RFP is for grant-funded activities happening from May 2025 through December 2026. Organizations that have a current WPF grant for voter engagement are not eligible to apply.

The second RFP, which will be available in June 2025, is for activities happening from December 2025 through December 2027. In future years, we anticipate there will be one RFP per year for projects to increase voter participation, likely opening over the summer for a funding decision in October.

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 projects that will support eligible Pennsylvanians, especially those who are underrepresented in the electorate, to exercise their right to vote.

Background

Through the Democracy and Civic Initiatives program, WPF seeks to build trust and participation, particularly among underrepresented communities, in Pennsylvania’s democratic processes. Elections are a keystone of our system of government, but often, voter participation rates are low across the board and especially low among certain demographic groups. The Foundation seeks to support nonpartisan efforts to increase the number of eligible Pennsylvanians who vote, especially members of underrepresented groups.

The Census Bureau’s *Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement*, conducted after every national election, provides data on the characteristics of voters. This analysis helps to describe whose participation in the election was lower than their percentage of the voting age population. Data collected following the November 2022 election showed that the following groups were underrepresented in the electorate, as compared to their share of the citizen voting age population:¹

- Young people, aged 18-29
- People of color, especially Hispanic and Latino/a people
- Naturalized citizens
- People who have not attended college (inclusive of those with and without high school diplomas)
- People with annual family incomes below \$50,000

The same populations were similarly underrepresented in the November 2020 electorate.²

Pennsylvania voter turnout, November 2022:

54.6% of people eligible to vote³



¹ Fabina, Jacob and Michael Martin, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022,” Current Population Survey Reports, P20-586, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2024. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2024/demo/p20-586.pdf>

² Fabina, Jacob, and Zachary Scherer, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2020,” Current Population Survey Reports, P20-585, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p20-585.pdf>

³ McDonald, Michael, “2022 General Election Turnout,” University of Florida Election Lab. <https://election.lab.ufl.edu/voter-turnout/2022-general-election-turnout/>

Opportunity Overview

WPF seeks to support nonpartisan efforts that increase the number of eligible Pennsylvanians who vote and decrease the racial gap in voter turnout. The most competitive proposals will focus on people who are underrepresented in the electorate as defined by race, age, income, educational attainment, family income or other factors that have been shown to predict lower rates of voter participation.

We are requesting proposals for **up to 20 months of funding** for activities taking place May 2025 – December 2026. 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.

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

WPF has allocated **\$2.5 million** to advance this objective at this time. At least half of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that have budgets under \$2 million per year and/or are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion.

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.

In addition, applicant organizations must have an established history of working with the communities they propose to reach with WPF funds. Projects may occur in any part of Pennsylvania.

Please note: William Penn Foundation is strictly nonpartisan and funds only charitable activities as defined by the Internal Revenue Service. As a private foundation, we cannot earmark funds for voter registration. Therefore, **voter registration activities are not eligible for funding** through this RFP and should not be included in the project budget or the description of project results.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on the criteria below. **Applicants should address these criteria in their narrative responses to the application questions**, with particular attention to how the proposed work will advance the stated objective.

Alignment with Objective			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Project activities and goals are unrelated to the defined objective.	Project activities and goals may advance the defined objective, but connection is vague.	Project will make a clear but indirect contribution to advancing the defined objective.	Project will make a clear and direct contribution to advancing the defined objective.
Equity and Inclusion			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No plan to prioritize underrepresented communities. No apparent community engagement.	Limited efforts to prioritize underrepresented communities. Sporadic or cursory engagement of relevant community members.	Project prioritizes access and creates opportunities for underrepresented communities. Meaningful engagement of relevant community members in project planning, goal-setting and implementation.	Underrepresented communities are leaders in project planning, goal-setting, and implementation.
Organizational Capacity			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No evidence of plan, timeline, resources, staffing, or partnerships necessary to achieve project's goals; no prior relevant experience with proposed work.	Some elements of project plan and resources are in place, but plan to fill gaps is vague or nonexistent.	Project has a realistic plan and timeline; some resources, staffing, and partnerships are in place, with a clear plan to fill remaining gaps.	Evidence of credible, realistic plan, timeline, resources, and staffing to achieve the project's goals; history of successful implementation of similar work.
Collaboration and Partnerships			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No identified partners or plans for collaboration.	Intended partners are identified but there are no clear commitments to collaborate that would strengthen the work.	Some committed partners and a clear plan to build new partnerships that will address gaps in perspective and expertise.	Evidence of commitment to collaborate from partners who will strengthen the work through diverse perspectives and expertise.

Additional expectations:

Intended Beneficiaries	Proposal will identify and describe a clearly defined population or community that the project aims to engage and positively impact.
Geography	A description of where project activities will take place is included. Projects that intend to work across large or dispersed geographies should describe the organizational capacity that supports their ability to work in multiple locations.
Prior Work History	The most competitive proposals will have established relationships and a history of successful engagement with the communities the applicant intends to reach.
Coordination with Similar Efforts	Projects that demonstrate coordination, and avoid duplication, with other voter engagement efforts, will be given additional consideration.
Evidence of Effectiveness	Proposals should describe how the applicant assesses their work to increase voter participation, and what evidence is used to determine impact and inform adjustments to the approach.
Budget	The requested budget is 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 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 optional informational webinar on **Friday, December 13, 2024 at 1:00PM EST.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should include funding for work through December 2026. 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, communications, and evaluation, 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.

Application Process

Before you apply, please review your responses to the five 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
Is your organization a 501(c)3 public charity or a government entity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your project likely to positively impact voter participation in Pennsylvania?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you defined where you plan to focus your work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have experience working with the communities you intend to reach?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you proposing a project to increase voter participation that does NOT include voter registration activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please also review all of the criteria on pages 6 and 7 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 Steve Preston at spreston@williampennfoundation.org

Timeline

December 9, 2024

Proposal submission period opens.

December 13, 2024

Informational Webinar (see page 8)

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.