

William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Reducing Environmental Burdens in Philadelphia

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Photo Credit: Thom Carroll for PhillyVoice

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 Environment and Public Space 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, measurably reduce the environmental burdens confronting Greater Philadelphia communities.

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. One significant limitation is that projects must take place in and primarily serve residents in the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, and/or Camden.

Proposals may focus on direct service, outreach and education, training and technical assistance, policy advocacy, system change or other ways to advance the objective. Proposals may focus on a community or neighborhood, or they 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).

Background

Many communities that are victims of years of racial discrimination and economic disinvestment have also been subject to a sustained undermining and degradation of their natural environments.

Institutional practices like racially discriminatory loan practices (known as redlining) and limited information sharing have combined with lack of political power to encourage the siting of environmentally harmful industrial, commercial, and municipal activities in and near many lower income communities and communities of color. These activities – including superfund sites, hazardous waste facilities, landfills, trash transfer stations, underground storage tanks, incinerators, sewage and sludge treatment facilities, power plants, and polluting industrial facilities – have undermined community quality of life, produced persistently poor public health outcomes, and precluded the enjoyment of the benefits of healthy natural assets like greenspace, clean water, and fresh air.

In recent years this aspect of environmental injustice has been recognized through the development of tools, analyses, and policies to identify and address the cumulative effects produced by the proliferation and geographic concentration of environmentally harmful activities over time. These include tools to identify areas that should be of priority concern (e.g. Pennsylvania’s PennEnviroScreen¹, New Jersey’s EJMAP², and the Council on Environmental Quality’s Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool³) and policies to prevent an intensification of impacts to those areas.⁴

The data these tools provide make clear that significant parts of the cities of Philadelphia, Camden, and Chester are burdened with harmful impacts from a range of longstanding industrial, commercial, and municipal activities.

During the community conversations held as part of our strategic planning process in mid-2024, we heard from many stakeholders that they wanted to work on projects that would address multiple environmental burdens suffered by their communities. This RFP is intended to respond to that desire.

¹ [Pennsylvania DEP Office of Environmental Justice PennEnviroScreen](#)

² [NJ DEP Environmental Justice, Mapping, Assessment, and Protection Tool \(EJMAP\)](#)

³ [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#)

⁴ [Environmental Defense Fund State Climate Equity Survey](#)



Photo Credit: Pexels

High Ozone Pollution

The American Lung Association's 2024 "State of the Air" report ranked the Philadelphia-Reading-Camden metropolitan area the 35th most polluted in the nation for ozone pollution, the worst metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic region.⁵

Air quality injustices

Across the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington region, people of color are 2.4 times as likely as white residents to live in areas with the highest respiratory risk from air pollution.⁶

⁵ [American Lung Association Press Release: April 24, 2024](#)

⁶ [6abc, "Struggling to breathe: Air quality injustices put neighbors in two local towns at risk"](#)

Opportunity Overview

With this objective and Request for Proposals (RFP), the Foundation seeks to support efforts that will help to measurably reduce environmental burdens impacting communities in Philadelphia, Camden, and/or Chester. In other objectives and associated RFPs, we focus on two specific types of environmental burdens: illegal dumping and untreated sewage overflow. Through this RFP, we are requesting proposals for one- to three-year projects that will focus on environmental burdens *other than* dumping and sewage overflow.

All submitted proposals should:

- identify the geographic area that the proposed work is intended to benefit
- define the environmental burden or burdens on which the proposed work will focus
- explain the harmful impacts that the environmental burden(s) create
- describe the way the reduction of the burden will be measured
- project (to the maximum extent possible) the amount by which the burden will be reduced
- identify (or describe a method for identifying) the baseline from which the burden will be reduced, and
- describe the proposed work.

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.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above, including organizing, advocacy, litigation, communications, and citizen science. We are not accepting proposals for capital projects or for the design or development of new technologies. Otherwise, all proposals that meet the criteria described below are encouraged. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

WPF has **\$4 million** available to advance this objective through this RFP. There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that projects may request. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

Eligibility

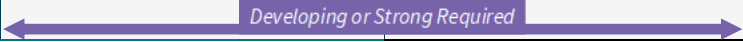
Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible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

Proposed projects must occur in and/or seek to serve residents and communities of **Philadelphia, Chester, 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:

Sustainability	Projects that produce improvements that are likely to be sustained over time will likely be most competitive.
Measurement	Projects that include sound and/or innovative methods and metrics for measuring and monitoring burden reduction will likely be most competitive.
Budget	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.

Learning and Insights

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 **Wednesday, March 26, 2025 at 1:00 PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to three years of funding and may include up to three months for planning. 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 an organization's operating budget.

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

Application Process

Before you apply, please review the 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 proposed work produce a measurable reduction in a specified environmental burden or a set of burdens?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your proposed work focused on one or more environmental burdens <i>other than</i> illegal dumping or untreated sewage overflow?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will your proposed work primarily benefit residents and communities in Philadelphia, Chester, and/or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will you be able to measure the reduction in the environmental burden(s) that are the focus of your work?	<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 ET on April 25, 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 Stuart Clarke at sclarke@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

March 19, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

March 26, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

April 25, 2025

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

May 7-12, 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.

May 12-June 6, 2025

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

July 25, 2025

WPF Board review selected proposals.

August 2025

Project implementation can begin.