

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Increasing Investment in Philadelphia Parks

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



Photo: J. Fusco for Historic Philadelphia, Inc.

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, increase three-year average annual per capita park spending from \$86 to \$95 as tallied by the Trust for Public Land's ParkScore®.¹

¹ This objective was defined prior to the release of our new strategic plan in mid-2024. Recently released information, discussed further in the “Background” section of this document, shows that the target dollar amount may no longer be applicable. With additional data, we will consider revising the target amounts in the future, but will preserve the intent of this objective: to increase public and private investment in Philadelphia parks (defined broadly to include municipal recreation centers and playgrounds).

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 be likely to increase investment in the Philadelphia parks and recreation system and may focus on advocacy, fundraising, increased volunteerism, policy or systems change, outreach and education, or other ways to advance the objective. Proposals may focus on increasing investments for a single park or across the City's parks and recreation system.

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.

This RFP seeks project proposals that will help increase the amount of money invested in Philadelphia parks.

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

A well-funded, well-maintained, and actively programmed parks and recreation system contributes to the quality of life of all Philadelphians. It contributes to the environmental, social, and economic health of our city.

One measure of the strength of a city's parks and recreation system is the ParkScore®, published annually by the Trust for Public Land (TPL). ParkScore is a comprehensive measure of the 100 most populous U.S. cities' urban parks systems. TPL and the ParkScore evaluate cities' parks systems based on five key criteria: access, equity, acreage, investment, and amenities. The score provides a standardized 0–100 ranking that allows for comparison and highlights strengths and gaps in public park access and quality. ParkScore reflects not just the quantity of parks, but also their distribution, quality, and equity of access. A higher ParkScore signals that a city is investing in public well-being, resilience, and community development — making it a valuable benchmark for policymakers, planners, and residents.

In addition to objectives focused on improving parks and public spaces, expanding programming in parks and other outdoor spaces, and increasing the number of urban trees, WPF has identified investment in parks as a key objective to improve residents' environments. We are using one of the calculations provided by ParkScore as a consistent, transparent, and publicly accessible metric of progress on this objective. To calculate total investment, ParkScore aggregates spending for publicly accessible parks and recreation facilities across all public agencies and private organizations, including monetized volunteer hours. To minimize the effect of annual fluctuations, investment in parks is reported as a three-year average based on the three most recently finalized fiscal years.

The Foundation's current objective focused on increasing investment in parks was announced in 2024 and is based on the 2024 ParkScore, in which Philadelphia's park system was ranked 32nd nationally, earning a score of 57.5 out of 100. The city excelled in park access, with 95% of residents living within a 10-minute walk to a park. However, it lagged in investment, spending approximately \$86 per capita, below the national average of \$124. For comparison, Washington, D.C., which ranked first in park system quality, spent \$284 per person in 2024.

Philadelphia's Parks & Recreation Department oversees a network of over 10,000 acres of public land and hundreds of facilities.



By 2025, Philadelphia improved its standing in the ParkScore ranking to 28th place, with a score of 63.1, and per capita investment of \$112. Investments through the Rebuild initiative, the addition of amenities like recreation centers and splash pads, and growth in the percentage of residents with nearby park access all contributed to the increased score.

The progress from 2024 to 2025 highlights Philadelphia's commitment to enhancing its parks and recreation system, focusing on increased investment and accessibility. Park advocates argue that increased support, whether through dedicated city allocations, public-private partnerships, volunteerism, or innovative financing mechanisms, is critical to ensuring that all neighborhoods, particularly those historically underserved, have access to safe, well-maintained, and vibrant green spaces. As improvements continue to be made, the Foundation will likely set a new target to pursue over the next ten years. Regardless of the specific dollar figure that is identified, the Foundation will continue to support efforts to increase sustainable investment in our parks system.

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that will increase investment in Philadelphia's parks and recreation facilities. Proposals can include efforts to increase investment from public or private sources, develop or strengthen innovative community initiatives, expand volunteer efforts, or other projects that are likely to yield increased sustainable investments in our parks and recreation sites. Funding can support system-wide applied research, capacity building, communications, advocacy, coalition building, and other appropriate activities. Projects can focus on individual sites or across the entire parks and recreation system.

We are requesting proposals for **one- to two-year projects**. 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.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. It is our aim to fund projects that have results that can be sustained over time. We are especially eager to see proposals for projects that draw in new public and private constituents, employ new or innovative funding strategies, and/or target areas of the system or city that have been chronically under resourced. 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, and we aim to attract and fund a range of projects. 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

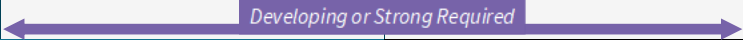
Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible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

Proposed projects should have a strong likelihood of increasing investment in municipally owned parks, recreation centers, and playgrounds in the city of Philadelphia.

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.
Developing or Strong Required			
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.
Developing or Strong Required			
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.
Developing or Strong Required			
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.
Developing or Strong Required			
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.
Developing or Strong Required			

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.
			

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 **Tuesday, June 24, 2025 at 1:00 PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to two years of funding. 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.

This RFP will **not** be funding capital expenses. All other aspects of project development and execution, including planning, materials, communications, outreach, and staffing, 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
Is your project likely to increase funding for parks and recreation centers in Philadelphia?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your organization a 501(c)3 nonprofit or a government agency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please also review all of the criteria on pages 7-8 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://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>. Submit your application by **5:00PM ET on July 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 Jazmine da Costa at jdacosta@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

June 18, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

June 24, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

July 25, 2025

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

August 6-11, 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.

August 11-September 5, 2025

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

October 24, 2025

WPF Board review selected proposals.

November 2025

Project implementation can begin.