

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Reducing Barriers to Training for Quality Jobs in the Philadelphia Region

Published June 18, 2025

Due July 25, 2025

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Photo: Rebuild Philadelphia

Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to improve the quality of life of residents of Philadelphia. However, the quality of life of many city residents is negatively impacted by persistent high rates of poverty and the significant income divide between White and Black and Brown households. To help contribute to efforts to reduce poverty in Philadelphia and support economic mobility for more Philadelphians, the Foundation's workforce development grantmaking is focused on helping Philadelphians access and keep quality jobs. While likely to evolve over time, the program's initial focus is on supporting efforts to reduce barriers that prevent individuals from accessing and completing existing workforce training programs that help them secure higher-paying, family sustaining jobs. A full description of the Workforce Training and Services program and its objective can be found on the Foundation's website. This specific Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations to advance the following objective:

By 2035, 10,000 individuals with high barriers to employment will complete workforce training and transition to employment, and 85% will still be employed after 12 months.

This objective was informed by 125 stakeholders and practitioners via interviews and focus groups.

The Foundation and its funding partners recognize 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 addressing this issue. For example, proposals may focus on direct service, policy or system change, or other ways to advance the objective and make tangible improvements in economic mobility for individuals living in the Philadelphia region. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or may seek to make change on a citywide or regional scale.

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 7-9 of this document.

WPF is excited to partner with 5 other foundations to advance this objective. Along with WPF, Comcast has provided lead support for this work. Additional significant support has been provided by the Connelly Foundation, FS Investments, M&T Bank, and the Philadelphia Foundation. By collaborating on this RFP, these funders have increased the total amount of funding available to support workforce development in our region and have simplified the application and reporting processes for prospective grantees.

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

Workforce development practitioners point to a range of barriers that often prevent individuals from accessing and completing training programs that could lead to higher-paying jobs and economic mobility. These barriers can include access to childcare and transportation, the inability to forgo income during training, language barriers, and past involvement with the justice system. These barriers can also impact employment retention. Experts suggest that an effective approach to addressing these barriers is for workforce programs to combine paid career training with “wrap-around” supportive services, which are non-training supports such as childcare, transportation, or counselling/coaching that can help job seekers overcome their challenges in completing job training and finding and maintaining family sustaining employment.

In 2023, White households in Philadelphia earned on average just under \$83,000 per year, which was higher than the national average of approximately \$75,000. But Black, African American, and Hispanic households earned less than \$51,000.¹

In 2023, Philadelphia had a labor force participation rate of 75.1% for residents ages 16-64, which decreased from 3 years prior and is also less than the national average of 76.3%.²



What is a quality job?

While definitions vary, WPF is interested in supporting workforce training efforts that prepare individuals for jobs that provide:

- *A family sustaining wage with benefits that promote economic mobility*
- *Fair and reliable scheduling practices and safe and healthy working conditions*
- *Career ladders and potential for advancement*
- *An inclusive organizational and management culture*

¹ [The Pew Charitable Trusts. \(2025\). Philadelphia 2025: The State of the City.](#)

² [The Pew Charitable Trusts. \(2025\). Philadelphia 2025: The State of the City.](#)

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation and our co-funder partners seek to support efforts that expand the effectiveness of high-quality workforce training by reducing the barriers to accessing and completing workforce programs, transitioning to employment, and successfully completing the first year of employment. Through this funding opportunity, we seek to support initiatives and programs that will result in career entry and advancement for populations facing significant barriers (e.g., historically disadvantaged populations, young people aged 16-24 who are not in school and not working; individuals with justice system involvement; and immigrants) to achieving economic mobility for themselves and their families. Initiatives serving in-school youth are also eligible to apply for funding, but these programs must directly lead to youth obtaining full-time employment after obtaining a high school diploma.

This funding opportunity will not support organizations that are new to workforce training. Funding awarded through this opportunity will be directed to organizations with a track record of success in workforce development. Whether organizations directly train and place jobseekers or work on systems change efforts, competitive proposals will be able to quantify the projected increase in the number of individuals facing high barriers who will complete training, transition to, and retain quality employment as a result of grant funding.

Given recent research funded by Pew Charitable Trusts and conducted by the Brookings Institution, this funding opportunity seeks to prioritize existing training programs that prepare people for employment in three growing sectors of our regional economy: materials machining, enterprise digital solutions, and biomedical/life sciences.³ In combination, these three sectors are expected to add over 85,000 high-quality jobs in our region over the next decade. Funders of this RFP want to ensure that residents of our region are prepared to secure those jobs.

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³ [The Pew Charitable Trusts & the Brookings Institution. \(2025\). *Roadmap for Quality Jobs*.](#)

As noted above, requests for funding may seek support for direct services and supports to remove barriers or may seek to advance systems and policy changes that will help to remove barriers to successful training and employment.

We are requesting proposals for projects **up to three years** to reduce workforce training barriers in the Philadelphia region. 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, particularly partnerships with employers and social service providers.

The Foundation and its partners recognize that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. All proposals that meet the review criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF and its funding partners anticipate awarding a total of **\$8.35 million** to advance this objective. Five million dollars of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations operating in the City of Philadelphia and serving Philadelphia residents. The remaining \$3.35 million will be awarded for programs in any area of the five-county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties).

While there is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that organizations may request, the grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective. For direct service proposals, we will take into account the number of people likely to complete training and the barriers that will be successfully addressed with participants as key factors for final amounts awarded.

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.

All projects must focus on supporting individuals in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties.


Please note: projects that are currently funded by WPF to advance this objective are not eligible to apply for this RFP.

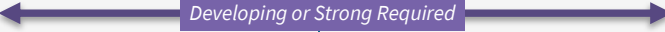
Review Criteria

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
Proposed activities are unrelated to the objective.	Proposed activities may advance the objective, but strength of connection is unclear.	Proposed activities will make a clear but indirect contribution to advancing the objective.	Proposed activities will make a clear and direct contribution to advancing the objective.
			
Program Design and Development			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No specific plans, program approach, or partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.	Limited or unclear plans, program approach, or partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.	Moderate or promising plans, program approach, or partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.	Strong plans, program approach, and partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.
			
Organizational Performance and Experience			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No implementation experience and no track record of success with barrier removal and/or with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.	Limited experience (less than 1 year) and limited track record of success with barrier removal and/or with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.	Some experience (1-5 years) and a track record of success with barrier removal and/or with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.	Deep experience (5+ years) and a track record of success with barrier removal and with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.
			
Partnerships and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No partnerships or coordination experience with relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs.	Relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs identified but there are no clear commitments or formal partnerships. No or limited experience providing program and service coordination leadership.	Some existing partnerships and connections to relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs and a clear plan to build new partnerships to fill gaps in needed resources. Some experience in providing program and service coordination leadership.	Demonstrated partnerships or commitments from relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs and a strong track record in program and service coordination leadership.
			

Community Outreach and Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Organization has not involved people with lived experience (i.e., knowledge and understanding gained from personal experience) in the design or management of proposed activities.	Organization has minimally or episodically involved people with lived experience in the design of proposed activities.	Organization has a clear plan to involve people with lived experience in the design of proposed activities.	The design of the organization's proposed activities is informed by and led with involvement of people with lived experience.
			

Employer Partnerships			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No formal employer partnerships described in proposed activities.	Proposed activities include informal employer partnerships, with occasional or episodic trainee placements for projects with direct service components.	Proposed activities demonstrate efforts underway to develop formal employer partnerships, with a pipeline of jobs and feedback mechanisms to address barriers limiting workforce entry, retention, and advancement for projects with direct service components.	Proposed activities include strong employer partnerships, with a demonstrated pipeline of high-quality jobs in place that pay a family sustaining wage for projects with direct service components.
			

Accessibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Proposed activities do not include considerations to ensure accessibility for all participants (e.g., location, timing, language, physical environment, etc.).	Proposed activities include some accessibility considerations.	Clear and specific efforts are being made to make proposed activities accessible, given the population of individuals being served.	Proposed activities take place in a highly accessible location(s), during convenient times, with no cost barriers to participants, and with consistent availability of language access.
			

Additional expectations:

Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and contribute to other WPF program objectives will be given additional consideration.
Budget Feasibility	The most competitive proposals will include budgets that are commensurate with the proposed activities and stated results.
Connected Employment	Proposals describing direct service activities are expected to demonstrate employment placement and 12-month employment retention for individuals receiving services.
Growth Sectors	Proposals that focus on employment within the 3 target sectors of materials machining, enterprise digital solutions, and biomedical/life sciences as identified in Brookings' Roadmap for Quality Jobs research will be given additional consideration.
Organizational Capacity	The most competitive proposals will include an implementation plan that includes existing and new staff, if needed, professional development, technology, data management, and other organizational resources to deliver the proposed services and/or activities.

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 **Thursday, June 26, 2025 at 11:00AM 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 should not exceed 25% of an organization's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, and implementation, 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 the three 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
Does your project advance opportunities for residents of the 5-county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your project have a track record of success addressing the barriers that inhibit people from completing workforce training and sustaining employment in quality jobs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your organization a public charity or government entity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please also review all of the criteria on pages 7-9 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 **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 so that the Foundation and our co-funder partners can learn more about applicants’ work. WPF will lead the proposal review and selection process in collaboration with our co-funding partners and maintain open communication with applicants regarding subsequent steps in the application process. Site visits will be 75-90 minutes in duration. We ask that organizations use this time to introduce key staff working on the proposed project, to show us 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 and partner funders’ Boards for consideration.

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 Stephanie Waller at swaller@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

June 18, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

June 26, 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.