

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Arts and Culture Capital Support

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Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to create a vibrant, dynamic, and accessible arts and culture sector that positively impacts the residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation’s Arts and Culture program was created to expand access to diverse, inclusive, and high-quality arts and culture experiences. A full description of the Arts and Culture program, its goals, and all its objectives can be found on the Foundation’s website. This specific Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to advance the following objective:

By 2035, 125 WPF-funded capital projects will enhance existing arts and culture spaces that are vital to their artistic fields and communities, making spaces safe, accessible, and welcoming to people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.

The Foundation recognizes 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 advancing this objective. A project may, for example, focus on universal or human-centered design, safety and accessibility improvements, public and community use, improvements necessary to maintain or improve the function of the space, or other ways to advance the objective. All projects must be designed to provide greater access to arts and culture experiences that are equitable and inclusive. Proposals must focus on existing spaces owned by, or with long-term leases held by, organizations with strong artistic, cultural, and civic value to the region. To be eligible for this funding, an organization must have received a William Penn Foundation grant within the past 10 years, as we seek to sustain the viability of past investments. Organizations previously awarded grants for capital funding in 2024 or 2025 are ineligible to apply at this time in order to make this opportunity available to more organizations.

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should describe a compelling explanation for how their proposed work will make tangible improvements in the quality of life for residents of Philadelphia. The specific criteria that will be used to assess all proposals can be found on pages 8 and 9 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.

This RFP seeks projects proposals that will support improvements to existing physical spaces in which arts and culture organizations provide accessible, equitable, and inclusive experiences.

Background

Arts and culture spaces play a pivotal role in strengthening the social and cultural fabric of our communities. These spaces are integral to the overall artistic programming experiences that provide Philadelphians with opportunities for civic engagement and deep community connections, creative expression, generate well-being, affirm cultural or community identity, and contribute to the vitality, economy, and livability of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. Well-designed, well-maintained spaces can elevate new approaches to programming, engagement, and business models leading to greater resilience and growth in the arts and culture sector. To provide high-quality arts and culture experiences in the Philadelphia region, there is also a great need for accessible spaces and places that are inclusive of communities, audiences, and artists who have traditionally not been reflected due to economic inequity, social injustice, or discrimination.

Arts and culture build livable communities in which residents take pride.

86% of Americans say, “arts and culture are important to their community’s quality of life and livability,” and 79% of the American public believe that the arts are “important to their community’s businesses, economy, and local jobs.” 89% of attendees agreed that the activity or venue they were attending was “a source of neighborhood pride for the community.”¹



Photo: Halkin Mason

¹ [Americans for the Arts, \(2023\). Arts & Economic Prosperity 6: “The Economic & Social Impact Study of Nonprofit Arts & Culture Organizations & Their Audiences.”](#)

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support projects that improve existing arts and culture spaces to connect more Philadelphians to high-quality arts and culture experiences. We are most interested in prioritizing projects that make it possible for all Philadelphians, including people with disabilities and those who have been most affected by economic inequity, racial discrimination, or other forms of injustice to benefit from high-quality arts and culture experiences—in spaces that are designed and equipped to be safe, welcoming, and engaging.

We are requesting proposals **for projects up to two years in duration** for capital improvement of a space that is currently owned by the applicant or improvement for a space under long-term lease by the applicant. Leases must have at least 8 years remaining. Projects may also address one-time major equipment purchases, including but not limited to technology, equipment to support artistic production and presentation, safety, and accessibility. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

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 review criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has **\$6 million available** to advance this objective through this RFP. 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. However, grant requests under \$750,000 and spaces owned by the organization will be most competitive.

At least \$1 million 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.

WPF works with [Green Building United](#) to provide optional, free, hands-on technical assistance (TA) to grantees to ensure that sustainability and climate resilience are factored into capital projects funded by WPF. Free TA is available to grantees in the planning, design, or early construction phases of their projects. TA can help organizations reduce operational costs, including energy costs; prepare for extreme weather; access financial incentives; and meet other sustainability goals. To date, support has included one-on-one discussions, design reviews with relevant professionals, and facilitated site visits to peer organizations who have addressed similar sustainability/resilience challenges. Organizations that are selected to advance beyond the written proposal stage of the review process will have the opportunity to learn more about free TA from Green Building United during their site visit with WPF staff.

Eligibility

Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Applicants must have been awarded a William Penn Foundation grant within the past 10 years from the Proposal Submission deadline. Grantees who are currently funded with their first WPF grant must have completed at least one year of that grant. Applicants must currently own their proposed physical space; or must hold a long-term lease for a minimum of the next 8 years. Eligible organizations include:

- **Arts and culture organizations:** organizations with a mission that centers on the creation, performance, and/or presentation of artistic-cultural programs and practices that are inclusive, equitable and have social impact.
- **Arts education organizations:** community art schools, community youth arts organizations, creative youth development organizations that work to make high-quality arts education accessible for youth ages 5-18.
- **Organizations with dedicated arts spaces:** Organizations that have a physical space with an intended commitment to artistic-cultural programs and practices and is used solely for the creation, performance, and/or presentation of high-quality works that are open to the public.

The majority of our funding will be awarded to projects in the City of Philadelphia. However, projects in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties, and the City of Camden, NJ will also be considered.

Please note:

The Foundation will not fund a new capital project if there is an active capital project underway supported through a current William Penn Foundation grant, or if the organization received capital funding from the Foundation in 2024 or 2025.

Definition of Terms

Arts and culture space	Dedicated space designed to support creative expression and artistic-cultural practices including dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, media arts, music, museum, musical theater, opera, multidisciplinary arts, theater, and visual arts.
High-quality	Applies artistic excellence and knowledge to create experiences that are informed by the needs, desires, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries.
Long-term lease	For the purposes of this RFP, at least eight years remaining on a lease agreement is required.
Universal and human-centered design	<p>Universal design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of age, size, or ability.</p> <p>Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem solving that engages the people for whom a space or object is being developed to create results that will meet their needs and priorities.</p>
Intended Beneficiaries	A well-defined group that the organization aims to engage and positively impact through direct programming experiences.





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.

Please Review:	
	YES NO
Does your project improve community access to, and experience within an existing arts and culture space?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Has your organization received funding from the William Penn Foundation in the past 10 years?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Can your organization confirm that it has not received a grant for a capital project in 2024 or 2025?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you own your space or have at least 8 years remaining on a long-term lease?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Is your space in the cities of Philadelphia or Camden, or Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

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

Review Criteria

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

Artistic and Cultural Practice			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
The role and/or skills of an artistic-cultural team is absent.	Artistic-cultural team does not play a conceptual or decision-making role in the creative experiences described and/or does not have relevant artistic-cultural skills or experience needed.	Artistic-cultural team has limited-to-developing relationship, or influence in shaping the creative experiences and goals described.	Highly skilled or trained artistic-cultural team is central to developing creative concepts and decision-making, and has demonstrated the knowledge and practices to be effective, and essential to its artistic field and community.
			 Strong Required
Organizational Strength			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Vague or unformed plan for future operations.	Stable financial health with limited plan to develop resources for expanded program/activity.	Stable financial health with moderately clear approach to business model, gaps in budget and resources.	Strong financial health, equipped with business model, necessary assets, and resources to sustain expanded program activity.
			 Strong Required
Design/Results Feasibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Unclear approach to the work, lacks project design and implementation details to achieve scope of work and results.	Conceptual approach to project design, implementation and results are vague, difficult to understand, or seem unrealistic.	Developed concept with tangible approach to project design and an implementation plan, with anticipated results that are informed by untested ideas and some past practices.	Detailed approach to the work with strong project design, implementation plan, and measurable results that are informed by past practices and evidence of success.
			 Strong Required
Orientation to Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Articulates some knowledge, but no evidence of practices that address barriers to people engaging with the organization or project, does not create environments where people feel valued and included. Unclear approach to welcoming and usable programs for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.	Inconsistent use of practices that address barriers to engagement and create environments where people feel valued and included. Testing approaches to welcoming and usable programs for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.	Demonstrates consistent practices that address barriers to engagement and create environments where people feel valued and included. Increasing use of approaches that make programs welcoming and usable for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.	Track record of embedded practices that address barriers to engagement, create environments where people feel valued and included, and consistently ensures programs are welcoming and usable for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.
		 Developing or Strong Required	

Understanding and Engagement of Intended Beneficiaries			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Intended beneficiaries are not clearly defined; community-centered practice or engagement is absent.	Provides minimal evidence of familiarity with intended beneficiaries or community-centered practices and plans for engaging them are sporadic and/or cursory.	Demonstrates some knowledge of intended beneficiaries and existing community-centered practices, and includes deliberate mechanisms to engage and deepen these relationships and practices.	Clearly identifies its intended beneficiaries and demonstrates deep relationships and community-centered practices with these beneficiaries.
		Developing or Strong Required	
Promotes Stewardship of Existing Cultural Assets			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Institution is not an existing cultural asset for the community or region.	Represents an existing cultural asset for the community or region with limited community-engaged programs; the project will benefit the institution overall.	Represents an existing cultural asset and demonstrates knowledge of inclusive engagement and existing practices to benefit community and institution overall.	Represents an existing cultural asset with track record of inclusive engagement and benefit to community or region.
		Developing or Strong Required	
Leverages a Prior Foundation Investment			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No prior WPF investment.	Historic but no recent WPF investment.	Recent* but modest WPF investment.	Recent* major WPF investment.
		Developing or Strong Required	

* Awarded within past 10 years

Additional expectations:

Articulated Benefits	Project addresses safety, accessibility or sense of welcome and inclusion for its intended beneficiaries and its community, and cannot be for the exclusive benefit of artists.
Project Development	Project identifies project management staffing and oversight. If part of a larger capital effort, proposal articulates a clear description of the project's phase of prioritization in the master plan and timeline.
Budget	Project budget demonstrates evidence of reasonable and informed cost assessments and vendors to allocate adequate resources for the project and an active fund development plan underway.
Contribution to other strategic objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and contribute to other Arts and Culture or WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.

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, September 16, 2025 at 11:00AM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to two years of funding and may include up to three months for planning. Organizations are encouraged to build on their existing capital projects, 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.

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

Application Process

If you answered “yes” to all of the questions in the eligibility section above and meet the stated criteria, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online system at <https://wfpf.my.site.com/grantee>.

Submit your application by **5:00PM ET on October 23, 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 **Program Director Barbara Wong** at bwong@williampennfoundation.org.*

Timeline

September 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

September 16, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 10)

October 23, 2025

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

November 7-10, 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.

November 10-December 10, 2025

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

February 6, 2026

WPF Board reviews selected proposals.

February 9, 2026

Project implementation can begin.