

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Preserving Urban Gardens and Farms in Philadelphia

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Photo: Neighborhood Gardens Trust

Introduction

The William Penn Foundation 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 program, its goal, and all its objectives can be found on the Foundation's website. This specific Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations advance the following objective:

By 2035, increase the proportion of urban garden parcels safe from development or legal threats from 44% to 75%.¹

¹ According to new research from Philadelphia Garden Data Collaborative, 42.2% (427 of 1011) of confirmed active public gardens in Philadelphia are secure. This is the fullest dataset available at the time this RFP is published. Further research is being commissioned by the William Penn Foundation to get an accurate count of parcels.

This objective was developed in conversation with Philadelphia growers and land access advocates, and with Philadelphia's 2023 **Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root** as a guide. Through this process, we learned that preserving existing growing spaces was a key priority of the community, and the Foundation's objective to increase the proportion of garden parcels safe from development or legal threats is in direct alignment with the Urban Agriculture Plan's published recommendations.

The Foundation recognizes that increasing the proportion of urban gardens and farms that are safe from development or legal threats may well require a variety of strategies, including capacity building, planning, organizing, advocacy, and direct investment to secure parcels. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project designs or approaches that we will consider in response to this RFP. We will consider proposals that focus on one or more specific sites, as well as proposals that seek to produce change on a citywide basis.

Regardless of the approach or the scope, all applicants should provide a compelling explanation for how their proposed work will advance the objective above. The criteria 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.

This RFP seeks project proposals that will advance the objective to increase the proportion of urban garden parcels safe from development or legal threats.

Background

Philadelphia’s urban gardens and farms are national models for how food can be grown hyper-locally, in ways that also promote local land ownership and strengthened communities.

The benefits of gardens for city residents are well documented – they add green space to neighborhoods, positively impact physical and mental well-being, serve as places where community members connect with one another, and are a source of local healthy food options. In most cases, these spaces serve communities that need them the most—in Philadelphia about 70% of active urban gardens and farms are in communities where more than 20% of the population lives below the poverty level.²

Despite these many benefits, these spaces are vulnerable. Many gardens occupy land that their stewards do not own and are therefore susceptible to being displaced for development. Effective stewardship can be labor and resource intensive, and in the absence of sufficient resources and sustained leadership gardens can lapse into disuse.

Community green spaces under threat

Growers and city officials acknowledge that land access and displacement—largely driven by urban development—are the **primary threats** to the city’s more than 400 community gardens, farms, and growing spaces.³



Alta Felton’s Greene Towne Countrie garden at 25th and Dickinson, which was later lost.
Photo: Philadelphia Horticultural Society

² “Philadelphia’s Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root”, p. 20

³ “After years of meeting and planning, Philly’s citywide Urban Agriculture Plan is finally here”, Philadelphia Inquirer, Nov. 2022

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation aims to support efforts that will contribute to increasing the proportion of Philadelphia's urban garden and farm parcels that are secure from development or legal threats. We expect to fund work focusing on interventions and parcels that communities have identified as high priorities.

We invite proposals for support of a range of activities that can result in more secure garden and farm parcels, including planning, technical assistance, stewardship, organizing, advocacy, and direct acquisition. The Foundation recognizes that levels of activity and stewardship vary across spaces in Philadelphia that are currently being used as gardens and farms. These spaces also have varied histories and connections to the surrounding community and its current residents. The most competitive proposals will be those that seek to support the preservation of well-established gardens and farms that can demonstrate community involvement and ongoing activity. All proposals should identify the parcel or parcels that are the focus of the proposed work, explain why that parcel or parcels are currently insecure, and explain how, why, and when the proposed work will result in that parcel or parcels becoming secure.

As noted, we also recognize that there are a variety of different approaches to preserving Philadelphia's urban gardens and farms and we therefore welcome a variety of responses to this RFP. This includes, but is not limited to, proposals that focus on:

- direct acquisition of existing, established, and actively managed urban garden and farm parcels
- strategies to reduce the number of community gardens and farms on private land sold at sheriff sales
- strategies to improve how the public is educated and informed about land access and the sale, transfer, and lease of gardens and farms
- organizing and convenings with clear goals that directly support preservation of urban farms and gardens
- legal and technical support that can help advance this objective

We will also consider work focused on improving long-term stewardship of insecure parcels through strengthened organizational and operational capacity. We will not fund proposals to start up new gardens. All funding will focus on existing and active gardens and farms.

We are requesting proposals for projects **up to two years in duration** that will result in securing garden and farm parcels in Philadelphia. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

WPF has **\$1.5 million available** to advance this objective at this time. There is no minimum or maximum that organizations may request, but we aim to attract and fund a range of projects. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the project's contribution to the overall objective.

Eligibility

Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a fiscal sponsor – 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.

Gardens managed by an individual or a single household where production is generally for personal use are not eligible.

Proposed projects must occur in Philadelphia.

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.

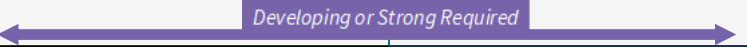
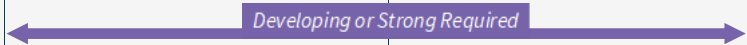
Is your proposal:	YES	NO
Helping to secure active urban garden or farm parcels from legal or development threats?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focused entirely on urban gardens or farms in Philadelphia?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prioritizing interventions and parcels that communities have identified as high priorities?	<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 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.	Identified beneficiaries of the project include prioritized communities.	Prioritized communities will receive significant benefits from the project.
Developing or Strong Required			
Meaningful Community Awareness of Proposed Work			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful evidence of community awareness of, interest in, or demand for proposed work.	Minimal evidence of community awareness of, interest in, and/or demand for proposed work.	Meaningful evidence of community awareness of, interest in, and/or demand for proposed work.	Specific involvement of community members and/or community-based organizations in development of proposal.
Developing or Strong Required			
Meaningful Community Engagement in Proposed Work			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful community engagement included in implementation plan for proposed work.	Limited community engagement in implementation plan for proposed work.	Significant community engagement as audience for proposed work (e.g. outreach and education).	Substantial community engagement as both audience for and also implementers of proposed work.
Developing or Strong Required			
Partnership and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address partnerships that will be necessary for success.	Explains the partnerships that will be necessary for success, but does not identify specific partners or describe the role that partners will play in the proposed work.	Identifies specific partners, provides at least a general description of the role that they will play in the work, and includes letters of support from at least some of them.	Identifies specific partners, provides a detailed description of the role that they will play in the work, and includes letters of support from each of them.
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.
			
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, successful outcomes are defined and achievable, and the proposal includes a sound project design and feasible implementation plan.
			

Additional expectations and considerations:

Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and contribute to other WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.
Stewardship and Sustainability	Proposals that include evidence of garden stewardship and sustainability will be prioritized. Evidence includes (but is not limited to) stable permission or agreement to access the land that is being gardened; active community of garden stewards with articulated decision-making structure; water access; and demonstrated commitment to long-term garden stewardship.
Acquisition Path	Proposals focused on parcels with a clear and feasible path to acquisition will be prioritized.
Threat Status	Proposals focused on parcels at clear and proximate risk of being lost will be prioritized.

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 1:00 PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets can cover up to two years of funding.

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. If you are using a fiscal sponsor, the 25% will be calculated based on the organization that is performing the proposed work.

All aspects of project development and execution including planning, design, materials, community engagement, consultants, 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

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://wpf.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](#).

Applicants requesting funding to preserve specific farm or garden parcels that currently make up a garden or farm in Philadelphia **should fill out [supplemental application questions](#) for each site** included in the proposal. After completing the questions for each site proposed for funding, please upload it as an attachment in the grant portal.

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

September 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens

September 16, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

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.