WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Increasing Urban Trees in Philadelphia

Published September 10, 2025   **Due October 23, 2025**

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 the number of trees by at least 35,000 across the seven Philly Tree Plan priority areas.

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. For example, proposals may focus on direct service, policy or system change, or other strategies to advance the objective. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or seek to make change citywide, provided they demonstrate impact in one or more of the Philly Tree Plan priority areas (as defined in the *Opportunity Overview* section below).

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 8-9 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 project proposals that will help to equitably and sustainably increase the number of trees providing benefits to neighborhoods across Philadelphia.

Background

Healthy trees make a significant contribution to the quality of life of Philadelphia residents. Trees provide protection from heat, reduce air pollution, improve physical and mental health, and are an important asset for mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts.[1] Given these benefits, it is especially unfortunate that trees are not equitably distributed across the city, and that the urban forest is threatened by development, inadequate maintenance, and the effects of climate change.[2]

A comprehensive assessment of Philadelphia's tree canopy conducted in 2018 found that 6% of the city's tree canopy (the part of the land that is covered by tree leaves and branches from a bird's-eye view) was lost over the last decade. The assessment also illustrates the inequitable distribution of trees. Tree canopy covers 20% of all land across the city, but this ranges from less than 5% in some areas to more than 45% in others. Areas with fewer trees and less tree canopy tend to be lower-income and Black and Brown-majority neighborhoods that are also beset by other inequities. The quality-of-life implications can be profound, as these areas often experience higher temperatures – sometimes up to a 22-degree disparity – and have worse physical and mental health outcomes.[3]

In response to these findings, the City launched a process to develop its first-ever strategic plan to make tree coverage more robust, equitable, and sustainable. Released in 2023 and informed by input from more than 9,000 residents, the **Philly Tree Plan** established a 10-year strategy for the equitable growth and care of Philadelphia's urban forest. Based on key environmental and socioeconomic factors, the Philly Tree Plan identified seven areas where an increase in tree canopy can provide the most benefit and recommends prioritizing these areas for investments to grow and care for the urban forest.

Philadelphia's urban forest stores 2.6 million tons of carbon dioxide and removes and stores an additional 99,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year.[4]

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[1] Philly Tree Plan, February 2023, p. 3
[2] Philly Tree Plan, February 2023, p. 2-7
[3] Philadelphia Tree Canopy Assessment, Dec. 2019
[4] USDA Forest Service, "The urban forests of Philadelphia", 2016

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that will help to grow and sustain Philadelphia's urban forest.

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.

As noted above, proposals may focus on a small geographic area or seek to make change on a citywide scale, provided they demonstrate impact in one or more of the Philly Tree Plan's priority areas. To navigate to the Philly Tree Plan's Priority Areas, please use this map. Please note: the map defaults to a different layer, so it is important that you turn on the correct layer to view the Priority Areas relevant to this opportunity. Refer to the screenshot here for instructions on how to select the correct layer. All proposals that meet the criteria described in the *Review Criteria* section below are encouraged.

The Foundation recognizes that multiple strategies can contribute to increasing the number of trees in Philadelphia by 2035, and we welcome a wide range of approaches in response to this RFP. This includes, but is not limited to, proposals that focus on:
- Tree planting and establishment care, including along streets and in parks and private yards;
- Reducing physical, economic, and social barriers to new trees and increasing community trust;
- Expanding the capacity to plant and care for trees through workforce development and volunteer engagement;
- Advocating for policy or funding changes that increase tree planting and establishment care citywide, with significant impact in priority areas;

While this RFP invites proposals that support activity in addition to tree planting, as these examples indicate, all proposals should articulate a clear connection between the proposed activities and the Foundation's objective of adding 35,000 trees in priority areas of the Philly Tree Plan by 2035.

In describing the proposed work, all submitted proposals should, as applicable:
- Identify the priority area(s) where the proposed work will take place or have an impact. Please specify the neighborhood(s) and/or include a map showing the anticipated project location(s).
- Articulate how the proposed work seeks to advance or complement up to three specific goal(s) (e.g., goal 1) or subgoal(s) (e.g., goal 1.2) of the Philly Tree Plan;
- Project (to the maximum extent possible) the number of trees that will be planted because of the work, and the anticipated timeframe.

We are requesting proposals for **up to three years of funding**. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations. 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 – including those led by smaller organizations and by people who have historically faced discrimination or exclusion. 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.

For applicants requesting funding for capital improvements, which includes tree planting: 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. 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 Philadelphia. Additionally, proposed projects must demonstrate impact in one or more of the Philly Tree Plan's Priority Areas. Please see below to confirm that your project area qualifies.

Accessing the Philly Tree Plan Priority Areas Map & Correct Layer	
Philly Tree Plan Map	CLICK HERE to navigate an interactive map of the Philly Tree Plan's Priority Areas.
"Priority Areas" Layer	Note: the map defaults to a different layer, so it is important that you turn on the correct layer to view the Priority Areas relevant to this opportunity. CLICK HERE for instructions on how to select the correct "Priority Areas" layer.

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:

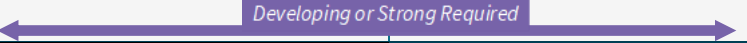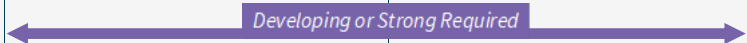|	YES	NO
Anticipated to equitably and sustainably increase the number of trees in Philadelphia by 2035?	☐	☐
Able to demonstrate impact in at least one of the priority areas listed in the Philly Tree Plan?	☐	☐

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 specifc 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.	Idenifies 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.
		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, successful outcomes are defined and achievable, and the proposal includes a sound project design and feasible implementation plan.
		Developing or Strong Required	

Additional expectations and considerations:

Maintenance and Establishment Care	Proposals for tree planting projects are expected to include strategies for establishment care and for routine maintenance beyond the establishment period.
Budget	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to advancing other WPF Environment and Public Space program 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 **Monday, September 15, 2025 at 11:00 AM ET.**
>
> Register for the webinar at https://lu.ma/williampennfoundation.

Budget

Project budgets may cover up to three 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 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.

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.**

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 Michele Perch at mperch@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

September 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

September 15, 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 review selected proposals.

February 9, 2026

Project implementation can begin.