

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Caregiver Supports and Opportunities for Early Learning

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Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to improve the lives of young children in Philadelphia. The Foundation's Children and Families program was created to expand access to programs and resources that support the healthy development and academic success of young children, ages 0 to 8, in Philadelphia. A full description of the Children and Families program, its goal, and its objectives 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, the Foundation will fund programming that provides caregiver supports and opportunities for early learning for 15,000 pregnant and parenting families with young children.

All families can benefit from increased resources and opportunities that help maximize their ability to support their children's early development. In Philadelphia, a stagnant and stubborn poverty rate and a high rate of adverse experiences compound the need for programs and services that can empower and support families. In conversations over the past couple of years, local families emphasized the value of community-based programs that provide assistance such as parental education, build children's social-emotional skills, and create enrichment opportunities. This RFP seeks to fund projects that will increase opportunities for pregnant and parenting families with young children to engage in programs and experiences that provide support and opportunities for family well-being and early learning.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways that organizations and communities can provide support and opportunities for early learning for families with young children ages 0 to 8. For this RFP, we will prioritize proposals that focus on direct service. Organizations may choose a small geographic focus or may seek to provide services in multiple neighborhoods, or citywide.

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 7 and 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 projects that will provide caregiver supports and opportunities for early learning for pregnant and parenting families with young children.

Background

Services for young children and their families can have significant impacts on short-term and long-term outcomes for child development, family well-being, and society as a whole.

Programs that serve children and their families can help build “protective factors, resiliency, and parental capacity to enhance child and family well-being and prevent child abuse and neglect.”¹ The most successful programs and services meaningfully and authentically engage caregivers, families, and communities in all aspects of programming, planning, and implementation. Through this RFP, WPF is looking to support approaches that advance outcomes for young children and their families through integrated and coordinated program and services. This means that early learning experiences for children and/or programs/supports for parents/caregivers are intentionally designed and advance clearly articulated goals for each generation.

More than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second in the first few years of life.²



¹ [Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Two-Generation Approaches*.](#)

² [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child. *Brain Architecture*.](#)

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that increase access to caregiver supports and opportunities for early learning for pregnant and parenting families with young children. Funding will be limited to projects that will positively impact families with young children, ages 0-8.

Programs/services proposed for funding must advance outcomes for both generations. Programs may serve both adults and children, or adults only, but defined outcomes for each age group must be clearly identified.

The most competitive proposals will include at least two of the following activities:

- Develop adults' ability to support their children's healthy development.
- Offer ongoing, interactive, intergenerational programming and services that include an early learning component (social-emotional, STEM, math, literacy, etc.) for children ages 0 to 8.
- Peer-to-peer supports for caregivers (e.g., support groups, mentoring).
- Provide resources, supports, and referrals for caregivers and families as needed.
- Increase the number of families being effectively served in needed programs and services.
- Other ideas not mentioned here that improve services, access to resources, and academic and/or social-emotional outcomes for young children and families.

Programming can take place in a variety of settings and with varying frequencies. See chart below for examples.

	Eligible for Funding	Not Eligible
Location	Homes, health care settings, community-based settings, libraries, recreation centers, etc.	Programming/services that take place solely in a virtual setting.
Frequency	Programming/services that take place bi-weekly, weekly, monthly, bi-monthly are all eligible.	Programs/ services that only consist of one-time programs or workshops (e.g., book fair, concert).
Dosage	Programs/services proposed for funding should include a minimum of four meetings/sessions.	Programs/services that do not include an expectation of ongoing connection with families.
Age Focus	Expectant parents; Families with children ages 0 to 8 (or a subset in that range).	Programming that primarily serves children ages 9 and above.
Geography	Programming/services must take place in Philadelphia and serve Philadelphia residents.	Programming that serves families located outside of the city of Philadelphia.

Please note, under this RFP, the Foundation will **not** consider proposals to support the following:

- Physical health services such as well child and adult exams or treatment
- Early intervention services
- Mental and behavioral health services (e.g., one-on-one therapeutic sessions)
- Full-day childcare

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.

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. All proposals that meet the review criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has **\$6 million available** to advance this objective through this RFP. The maximum amount of funding that organizations may request for direct expenses is \$800,000 over three years. (This does not include the overhead amount that will be added to project budgets, based on a formula described on the “How to Apply” section of our website).

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 and serve families who are residents of Philadelphia.

Existing grantees currently receiving funding to advance this objective cannot request additional funds for their current projects.

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.

Does your proposed program:

	YES	NO
Exclusively focus on families in Philadelphia?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serve pregnant and/or parenting families with children ages 0 to 8?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support family well-being and early learning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide ongoing opportunities to connect with families?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Come at no cost to families?	<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
Project conveys no meaningful connection to the objective.	Project would make a marginal and/or uncertain contribution to advancing the objective.	Project would make a clear contribution to advancing the objective.	Project would make a clear and significant contribution to advancing the objective.
		Developing or Strong Required	
Program Design and Feasibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Proposal does not provide a clear approach to the work. Anticipated outcomes and success are not well-defined.	Proposal describes an approach to the work, but some aspects are vague, difficult to understand or seem unrealistic. Anticipated outcomes are defined, but are of uncertain achievability, based on the details provided.	Proposal provides a clear approach but could be more specific. Anticipated outcomes require further clarification to assess feasibility.	Proposal provides a clear and feasible plan to implement the work and includes a solid justification for anticipated outcomes.
		Developing or Strong Required	
Partnerships and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No potential partners or plans for collaboration.	Potential partners relevant to the project are identified but there are no clear commitments.	Some committed partnerships relevant to the project, a plan to build any necessary new partnerships, and a description of each partner's role.	Sufficient committed partnerships relevant to the project, a description of each partner's role, and a track record of successful collaboration.
		Developing or Strong Required	
Organizational Experience			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No implementation experience and no track record of success.	Less than three years of experience with advancing the specified objective and a limited track record of success.	Three to five years of experience advancing the specified objective and success in Philadelphia or other relevant cities or regions.	More than five years of experience advancing the specified objective and an extensive track record of success in Philadelphia and/or Pennsylvania.
		Emergent, Developing, or Strong Required	
Community Knowledge and Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No evidence of familiarity with the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project and no plan for future engagement.	Minimal evidence of familiarity with intended beneficiaries of the proposed project, but there is a commitment to develop a stakeholder engagement plan during implementation.	Evidence of familiarity with the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project and there is a plan for ongoing stakeholder engagement during implementation.	Key components of the project were informed by the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project and there is a plan for ongoing engagement during implementation.
		Developing or Strong Required	

Additional expectations:

Focus Population	Proposal should focus on providing supports for traditionally marginalized communities including low-income, people of color, and non-English language speakers.
Outcomes	Proposal clearly describes goals of the program and provides evidence (e.g., evaluation data, survey results, family testimonials, etc.) that the program has a positive impact on families <u>and</u> directly affects children's academic and/or social-emotional learning and development.
Evidence Base	Proposal clearly describes methods or interventions that have been shown through research to work effectively. Interventions should employ strategies that have been shown to be culturally and linguistically relevant for the population served.
Demand	Applicant can demonstrate interest or demand for the proposed services (feedback from current or intended participants, waitlists, etc.).
Cost to Families	Programming and services are provided at no cost to families.
Accessibility	Planned services should take place in accessible locations, during convenient times, with consistently available language supports for non-English speaking individuals.
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities, numbers of families served, and the stated results.

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 **Wednesday, December 17, 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 from WPF should not exceed 25% of a participating organization's operating budget.

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

Proposals that Include Advocacy and Lobbying

The Foundation recognizes that advocacy can sometimes be a useful tactic to advance certain objectives. Advocacy takes many forms and sometimes includes activities that the Internal Revenue Service defines as lobbying. (See [Application Guidelines for Advocacy Projects](#) for general information on the IRS lobbying rules.) The Foundation is open to proposals that include advocacy and/or lobbying as part of the project and may fund projects that include lobbying so long as certain requirements are met.

Applications that include advocacy or lobbying must:

1. Show in the budget submitted by the applicant that the amount requested from the Foundation is less than 80% of the total project budget.
2. Identify the proportion of the total project budget, if any, that may support activities defined as lobbying under the IRS rules (the “lobbying percentage”). (You will see a specific question about this on the budget template.)
3. Show that the applicant has funding commitments that will cover a minimum of 20% of the total project budget for at least the first year of the proposed grant period. In-kind contributions cannot be counted toward this portion of the budget. (Organizations will be expected to demonstrate funding commitments for at least 20% of the budget for all years of the grant period, but we recognize that it may take additional time to secure those commitments.)
4. If the lobbying percentage is more than 20% of the project budget, the applicant must show that they have committed funds that exceed that lobbying percentage.

In no cases can WPF earmark funds for lobbying activities, nor can Foundation funds be used to support or oppose any candidate for public office, for voter registration efforts, or for any partisan purposes.

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 **January 29, 2026**. 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 Amanda Charles at acharles@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

December 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

December 17, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

January 29, 2026

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

February 19-20, 2026

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.

February 20-March 13, 2026

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

April 24, 2026

WPF Board review selected proposals.

May 2026

Project implementation can begin.