

William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Community Greening Plans

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Photo: Tioga Hope Garden, taken by Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

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, establish and begin implementation of at least six community-driven plans to improve and expand green space.

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. However, projects must occur in the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, or Camden.

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 8-10 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 support residents of Philadelphia, Chester, and Camden to establish a shared vision for green space in their neighborhoods through community-driven planning.

Background

Green spaces are assets in urban neighborhoods, providing a multitude of benefits such as reduced air and noise pollution, improved physical and mental health, and reductions in violent crime.¹ While the body of evidence demonstrating the social, economic, and environmental value of green space in cities is substantial, there is also considerable evidence that all urban communities do not have equitable access to the benefits of nature, and that this inequity is driven by the history and legacy of discrimination.²

Initiatives intended to expand and improve green space in neighborhoods that lack these important assets can address this inequity, especially when communities are meaningfully involved in planning and implementation. When investments in green space are made without meaningful community involvement, they can lead to a reduced sense of belonging among long-time residents and an increase in property values, which often results in gentrification and displacement of existing residents and businesses.³ Community-driven planning processes, which value the expertise of community members and center their needs and interests, can help to deliver green space to neighborhoods while avoiding these potential negative outcomes.⁴

A sense of empowerment over changes in the neighborhood environment is significantly and positively associated with better mental health and higher levels of happiness and self-rated health among residents.⁵



¹ ["Social perceptions of the value of green spaces: A view from the South," Frontiers in Sustainable Cities](#)

² ["The Nature Gap," Center for American Progress](#)

³ Jelks NO, Jennings V, Rigolon A. Green Gentrification and Health: A Scoping Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2021 Jan 21;18(3):907. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18030907. PMID: 33494268; PMCID: PMC7908481.

⁴ ["Community-centered Solutions for Green Gentrification and Displacement," River Network](#)

⁵ ["Ownership of change: Participatory development of a novel latent construct for neighborhoods and health equity research," ScienceDirect](#)

Photo: Deeply Rooted

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation would like to support efforts that will establish community-driven plans focused on improving and expanding green space in Philadelphia, Chester, and Camden. We invite proposals for work that will result in completed and implementable community greening plans by the end of the grant term.

This RFP seeks to support planning processes that will explore greening strategies across a defined geographic area. Projects that intend to develop a plan for one specific space are not eligible for funding through this RFP.

As this objective supports community-driven planning, we recognize that neighborhoods may have different priorities for their green space and that there are many tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. Improving and expanding green space should be the primary focus of plans funded through this RFP. While we do not require applicants to adhere to a specific planning framework, we expect planning processes to include assessment of existing assets and current conditions, establishing goals and/or priorities, defining pathways for achieving those goals, and identifying resources that will support the plan's successful implementation.⁶

We also recognize the opportunity for investment in green space to drive positive economic outcomes for communities. Therefore, we welcome proposals that will explore greening strategies that have the potential to generate equitable economic benefits and prevent or mitigate negative economic impacts associated with residential, business, or cultural displacement.

Applicants may use requested grant funds to start and complete a plan, or they may use requested grant funds to complete a planning process that has already been initiated. Applicants may request support for all aspects of the planning process, which may include but are not limited to outreach and education, communications, research, partnership-building, technical assistance, and community and stakeholder engagement. **We will not fund implementation of plans through this RFP; that opportunity will be provided in a future RFP.**

Proposals must be exclusively focused on planning to be eligible for funding through this RFP. However, we welcome proposals that include activities and/or pilot projects that are explicitly intended to spur and sustain community buy-in and involvement, and/or test ideas that would inform the plan.⁷ Examples of pilot projects that may inform the planning process could include, but are not limited to:

- Small-scale greening projects, such as installation of temporary planters along a business corridor or a pollinator garden in a neighborhood green space
- Giveaways of plants and/or gardening materials to neighborhood residents

⁶ For helpful resources related to community-driven planning, see Philadelphia Citizens Planning Institute's "[CPI in a Box](#)" and the [American Planning Association Community Engagement Interest Group's Resource Library](#).

⁷ To learn more about how pilot projects can be a valuable component of planning processes, see [Planning By Doing: How Small, Citizen-Powered Projects Inform Large Planning Decisions](#) (Gehl Studio, 2016).

- Activation of neighborhood green spaces
- Paid or volunteer cleanup activities

Proposals may allocate up to 5% of the total requested direct project costs to these activities/projects.

We are requesting proposals for **one- to two-year projects**. 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.

In describing the proposed work, all submitted proposals should, as applicable:

- Define the geographic footprint of the plan and the expected impact, e.g. number of residents served
- Describe the project deliverable that will be completed by the end of the grant term, and
- Articulate how the proposed work will contribute to the production of an implementable plan.

All proposals that meet the criteria described on pages 8-10 are encouraged.

WPF has **\$2 million** available to advance this objective through this RFP. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the project's contribution to the overall objective. While there is no maximum grant request, requests under \$300,000 will be most competitive.

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 the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, or Camden.

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 project:	YES	NO
Proposing a community-driven planning process that is primarily focused on improving and expanding green space?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focused on a clearly defined geographic area in the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focused exclusively on planning (i.e. not implementation)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going to produce a completed plan by the end of the grant term?	<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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			
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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			
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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			
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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			
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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			

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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			
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.
<i>Developing or Strong Required</i>			

Additional expectations and considerations:

Project Deliverable	Proposed work should produce a completed plan by the end of the grant term. Proposals should clearly define the purpose and parameters of the anticipated project deliverable.
Feasibility of Implementation	Proposals should demonstrate that planning processes will address the practical and financial requirements necessary to make plan implementation feasible.
Geographic Footprint	Proposals should clearly define the geographic footprint of the project. Applicants should also define the expected impact of the work, e.g. number of residents served.
Prioritized Communities	Proposals that primarily serve historically disinvested populations, including communities of color and low-income communities, will be most competitive.
Compensation for Partners and Community Members	Partner organizations and community stakeholders should be appropriately compensated for their roles and contributions. ⁸
Coordination with Relevant Efforts	Proposals that demonstrate awareness of and intention to coordinate with other relevant planning processes will be most competitive.
Budget	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.

⁸ For guidance on this topic, see Urban Land Institute's [Equitable Compensation for Community Engagement Guidebook](#).

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, December 16, 2025 at 1:00 PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover **up to two years** of funding.

Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any fees to partner organizations or consultants. Proposals may include funds to provide fair compensation to community members in exchange for their time and expertise. Proposals may allocate up to 5% of the total requested grant funds to activities and/or pilot projects that are explicitly intended to spur and sustain community buy-in and involvement, and/or test ideas that would inform the plan (see page 5 for examples). This information can be provided in the proposal narrative.

Except in rare circumstances, total funding from WPF should not exceed 25% of an applicant's operating budget.

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://wfp.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 Alison Jones at ajones@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

December 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens

December 16, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 11)

January 29, 2026

Proposals due by 5:00 PM 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 reviews selected proposals

May 2026

Project implementation can begin.