

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Supporting Outdoor Programming

Published December 10, 2025

Due January 29, 2026

William Penn Foundation
Two Logan Square, Suite 1100
100 North 18th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
williampennfoundation.org



*Photo: Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia |
Hunting Park Lil Safety Village*

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, support 50,000 participant program days* of park, trail, and water programming.

* Participant Program Day = Number of Participants x Program Duration in Days

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. Projects must take place in and primarily serve residents of the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden and may focus on direct program delivery or on activities intended to improve a program's effectiveness or sustainability. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or may seek to make change on a larger scale, as long as they have a significant impact in Philadelphia and/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 help to equitably activate parks, trails, and water in Philadelphia and Camden.

Background

Research demonstrates that time in nature provides a multitude of benefits to people, including improved health, well-being, and cognition.¹ Most people, regardless of background or socioeconomic status, want to be able to access and enjoy the outdoors, yet barriers – including safety concerns and lack of inviting spaces or activities² – will often get in the way. Programs that activate parks, trails, and water can help to lower some of these barriers by fostering a sense of safety, belonging, and joy among participants. Well-run programs can enhance the value of these spaces within a community while also engendering feelings of connection and care for these shared spaces.

We recognize that there are many ways that organizations and communities can increase participation opportunities for park, trail, and water programming. We are seeking to support projects and programs that organizations working in Philadelphia and Camden believe will be most effective in making progress on the objective above. There are few limitations on a project's approach to advancing the objective. If it is designed to advance opportunities for people in the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden to have equitable access to high-quality outdoor programs and meets all of the criteria defined in this document, your project will be eligible for support (with exceptions noted on page 5).

In 2023, 175.8 million Americans — 57.3% of the population aged 6 and older — participated in outdoor recreation, with 7.7 million trying it for the first time. This growth was driven by increased participation from women, people of color, and seniors.³



Photo: Black Girls With Green Thumbs

¹[Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence - PMC](#)

²[Equity-of-Access-to-Trails-Market-Research-Fall-2020.pdf](#)

³[Outdoor Foundation, 2024 Outdoor Participation Trends Report](#)

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to invest in park, trail, and water programming⁴ in the cities of Philadelphia and Camden. Programs that create opportunities to experience these public spaces deliver multiple benefits: participants gain tangible health and wellness outcomes by being active and connected to nature, and the spaces themselves are enhanced when more community members appreciate and value them.

This RFP will prioritize projects that serve communities that have experienced the greatest barriers to accessing the benefits of the outdoors, including but not limited to communities of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, members of disability communities, queer communities, seniors, young children, and others who have faced barriers to participation.

While expanding access to outdoor experiences is important, we also prioritize the quality of those experiences, recognizing that programs that are thoughtfully designed and effectively delivered are more likely to foster safety, belonging, and well-being. The most competitive proposals will describe programs that expand opportunities for meaningful outdoor engagement; respond to clear community interest or demand; are easily accessed, welcoming, and grounded in effective practice; foster lasting connections to the outdoors; and demonstrate thoughtful risk management, trusted community relationships, and plans for program sustainability. Proposals should demonstrate that program leads are trained and experienced in serving their communities and delivering safe, high-quality programs. Programs should be shaped by the communities they serve and benefit people who have historically had limited access to outdoor experiences. All programs must be offered at no cost to participants. The Review Criteria on pages 8-10 outline these expectations in more detail.

The following types of projects will **not** be eligible for funding:

- Capital projects
- Planning projects
- Advocacy projects
- Communications and marketing projects
- Research projects
- Programs that do not take place outdoors or engage participants directly
- Competitive sports programs
- School-day programs for students
- Programs in which participants are primarily spectators or workers (e.g., musical or theater performances, park clean-ups or tree planting, etc.).⁵

⁴ For the purposes of this RFP, “park, trail, and water programming” includes activities that connect people with outdoor or nature-based experiences in any setting that is safe, publicly accessible, and suitable for participant engagement, including privately owned sites that are open and welcoming to the public.

⁵ Paid youth or community members who help deliver the program will be regarded as staff, not participants.

Proposals may include modest capital, planning, research, or communications costs when they directly support an eligible project. These supporting costs can help to strengthen or deliver the program; for example, purchasing equipment, conducting community engagement that informs program delivery, or undertaking communications associated with program recruitment.

We are requesting proposals for **up to three years of funding** for projects that support participation in park, trail, and water programs. 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.

As noted above, 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 criteria described below are encouraged.

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. We aim to attract and fund a range of projects. There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that projects may request. However, requests in the range of \$100,000 - \$300,000, including indirect costs, will likely be most competitive. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the scope of the project and the project's contribution to the overall objective. We are especially interested in proposals from – or developed in partnership with – organizations led by people of color, smaller community-based organizations, and others that have historically faced barriers to accessing philanthropic funding.

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 program beneficiaries and program locations must be in the cities of Philadelphia and/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.

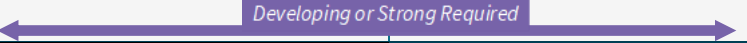
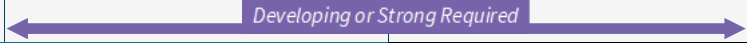
Key Questions:	
	YES NO
Will your project focus on program delivery and result in a significant number of participant program days of park, trail, and/or water programming?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Will your program primarily provide opportunities to residents of the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Will your programming take place in the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Is your programming provided at no charge to participants?	<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:

Accessibility	Proposals will be more competitive if the program is designed to be truly accessible: located where people can easily and affordably get to it, scheduled at convenient times, and inclusive of participants who need accommodations, language access, or other supports to fully take part. All programs must be offered at no cost to participants.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to other WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.
Inclusive Recruitment and Participation	Proposals will be most competitive when they are designed to benefit people who have historically had limited access to outdoor experiences — and when applicants demonstrate intentional, inclusive outreach and recruitment strategies to reach and welcome these communities. This includes but is not limited to communities of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, members of disability communities, queer communities, seniors, young children, and others who have faced barriers to participation.
Lasting Connection to the Outdoors	Proposals will be more competitive if they demonstrate strong potential for participants to continue engaging with the outdoors beyond the program itself. This may be shown through providing equipment or building skills that enable independent participation, offering programs in accessible or familiar locations, fostering intentional peer or family involvement, or other strategies that encourage lasting connection.
Program Design	Proposals should clearly describe the positive impacts they seek to create and demonstrate high-quality programming that fosters safety, belonging, and well-being in the outdoors. The strongest proposals will describe programs that are grounded in effective practice – informed by research, prior experience, or community knowledge – and show clear interest or demand from the people they aim to serve.
Project Budget	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results. Partner organizations and community stakeholders should be appropriately compensated for their roles and contributions.
Risk Management	All proposals should explain the procedures that are in place to help ensure the health, safety, and security of program participants and program staff.
Relationship to Community	Proposals will be more competitive when they demonstrate that board, staff, or project leads have deep experience and trusted relationships with the communities they aim to serve.
Sustainability of Program	Proposals will likely be stronger when they include a realistic plan to sustain and strengthen the program's impact and quality beyond the grant period. This may include strategies such as building or retaining the people and partnerships needed for long-term success, assessing and improving program effectiveness, developing future funding sources, or other approaches.

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 3:00 PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should 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 applicant's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, materials and equipment, 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://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>.

Submit your application by **5:00 PM ET on Thursday, 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](#).**

Applicants must also **provide an estimated number of participants for each program (to be supported by WPF) and the estimated average hours of participation per person**. Please complete the [program information attachment](#) and upload it as an attachment in the grants 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 Michele Perch at mperch@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

December 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens

December 17, 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.