

**WilliamPennFoundation**

Request for Proposals

# **Responsive, Accountable Local Government in Philadelphia**

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# Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to improve quality of life for residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation's Democracy & Civic Initiatives program was created to support collective and collaborative action toward a more engaged, participatory city and state. A full description of the Democracy & Civic Initiatives program, its goals, and all of 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:

**Philadelphians have confidence that local government is responsive to their needs and accountable to constituent priorities.**

When residents see their participation influencing how government works, their desire to participate in government increases. This RFP seeks projects that will provide opportunities for people to make their voices heard by Philadelphia City government.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways to contribute to increasing Philadelphians' confidence that local government is responsive to their needs and accountable to their priorities. With that understanding, this RFP imposes few limitations on the approach that applicants may take. For example, projects may focus on nonpartisan outreach and civic education, organizing, advocacy, service delivery and process improvement, or technical assistance. However, as a private foundation, we cannot earmark funds for voter registration. **Voter registration activities are not eligible for funding** through this RFP.

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should describe 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 7 and 8 of this document.

**This RFP seeks proposals that will improve Philadelphians' confidence in the City's ability to serve their needs.**

### **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.

# Background

Through the Democracy and Civic Initiatives program, WPF seeks to build trust and participation, particularly among underrepresented communities, in Pennsylvania’s democratic processes. Trust and confidence grow when people inside and outside of government work together to set policy and advance a shared agenda.

Philadelphians see the impact of local government on their lives every day. Local government determines whether trash gets picked up from the curb each week, how the schools are run, the cost of someone’s property taxes each year, and which local businesses are approved to open on a block. Despite the significant influence of local government on people’s lives, the importance of local government is overlooked when it comes time to participate in local elections, as we often see voter turnout below 35% in Philadelphia when it comes time to vote for Mayor, and it can be even less for other offices like City Controller or District Attorney.

Studies show that voters don’t turn out to vote when they feel like the government doesn’t take their opinions into account when making decisions<sup>1</sup>. Through this opportunity, we hope to help Philadelphians have their voices be better heard by local government.

In this RFP, WPF is focusing on helping people inside and outside of Philadelphia government build a local government that is more responsive to the needs of Philadelphians. WPF plans to track this objective through a periodic survey to understand change over time.



**55% of Philadelphia residents believe that city government “rarely or never” listens to people like them when it makes decisions about what to do.**

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<sup>1</sup> [Ipsos, 2020. "Why don't people vote?"](#)



# Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that help Philadelphia’s local government be responsive to residents’ needs and accountable to constituent priorities.

For this RFP, “local government” entails the following:

- City of Philadelphia government departments, agencies, boards and commissions
- All elected officials in the City of Philadelphia
- The School District of Philadelphia

The Foundation recognizes that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. Some examples of proposals could include:

- Neighborhood civic groups sharing actionable information with neighbors.
- City government departments engaging with community to make government more responsive to resident needs.
- Collective advocacy for policy reforms.

Standalone civic education efforts will not be funded. Any proposals that include civic education must include direct support for participants to use newly developed skills in support of local advocacy organizations or similar ongoing efforts during and after the grant period concludes.

These are examples of possible project types, but all proposals that meet the review criteria described below are encouraged.

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that help Philadelphia’s local government be responsive to residents’ needs and accountable to constituent priorities. 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.

WPF has **\$2.5 million available** to advance this objective through this RFP. While there is no maximum allowable grant request amount, proposals below \$350,000 will be most competitive.

At least \$1 million of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that have budgets under \$1 million per year and/or are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion.

## 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.


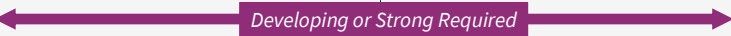
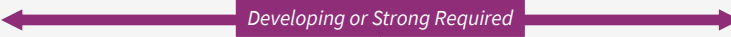

Proposed projects must occur in Philadelphia. **Voter registration activities are not eligible for funding** through this RFP.

**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 Project:	YES	NO
Aim to improve how responsive local government is to the needs of Philadelphians?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entirely focus on the City of Philadelphia, an elected office in Philadelphia, and/or the School District of Philadelphia?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include engagement with the communities it intends to impact?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create opportunities for Philadelphians to take action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# 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 activities and goals are unrelated to the defined objective.	Project activities and goals may advance the defined objective, but connection is vague.	Project will make a clear but indirect contribution to advancing the defined objective.	Project will make a clear and direct contribution to advancing the defined objective.
			
Inclusive Approach			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No plan to prioritize underrepresented communities. No apparent community engagement.	Limited efforts to prioritize underrepresented communities. Sporadic or cursory engagement of relevant community members.	Project prioritizes access and creates opportunities for underrepresented communities. Meaningful engagement of relevant community members in project planning, goal-setting and implementation.	Underrepresented communities are leaders in project planning, goal-setting, and implementation.
			
Organizational Capacity			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No evidence of plan, timeline, resources, staffing, or partnerships necessary to achieve project's goals; no prior relevant experience with proposed work.	Some elements of project plan and resources are in place, but plan to fill gaps is vague or nonexistent.	Project has a realistic plan and timeline; some resources, staffing, and partnerships are in place, with a clear plan to fill remaining gaps.	Evidence of credible, realistic plan, timeline, resources, and staffing to achieve the project's goals; history of successful implementation of similar work.
			
Collaboration and Partnerships			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No identified partners or plans for collaboration.	Intended partners are identified but there are no clear commitments to collaborate that would strengthen the work.	Some committed partners and a clear plan to build new partnerships that will address gaps in perspective and expertise.	Evidence of commitment to collaborate from partners who will strengthen the work through diverse perspectives and expertise.
			

### Additional expectations:

<b>Budget</b>	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.
<b>Coordination with Similar Efforts</b>	Projects that demonstrate coordination with partner organizations and avoid duplication with other similar efforts will be given preference.
<b>Intended Beneficiaries</b>	Proposal clearly identifies intended beneficiaries for programming. The selection and/or recruitment process for intended beneficiaries is outlined.
<b>Established Relationships</b>	The most competitive proposals will have established relationships and a history of successful engagement with the communities the applicant intends to reach.



# 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 11:00 AM ET.**

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

# Budget

Project budgets should cover up to 24 months of funding. 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 Steve Preston, Program Officer for Democracy and Civic Initiatives at [spreston@williampennfoundation.org](mailto:spreston@williampennfoundation.org).*

# Timeline

## December 10, 2025

Proposal submission period opens

## December 16, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

## 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