WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Arts and Culture Programming

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Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to create a vibrant, dynamic, and accessible arts and culture sector that positively impacts the residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation's Arts and Culture program was created to expand access to diverse, inclusive, and high-quality arts and culture experiences. A full description of the Arts and Culture program, its goals, 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:

By 2035, 250 arts and culture programs or projects funded by WPF will be intentionally designed, developed, and presented to prioritize creative experiences and inclusive, welcoming practices to engage people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.

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.

All projects must make arts and culture experiences accessible to audiences and be driven by skilled artists and culture bearers. Proposals may focus on one artistic discipline or be multi-disciplinary and may have a small geographic focus or seek to provide programming on a citywide or county scale. 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 Greater Philadelphia. The specific criteria that will be used to assess all proposals can be found on pages 8 and 9 of this document.

Please note: This RFP is only open to organizations with annual operating expenses (AOE) of more than $750,000. This RFP complements a previous RFP that sought proposals from organizations with AOE of less than $750,000. Those grants were awarded in February 2026.

Based on the past 12 months of applications submitted to WPF's Arts and Culture program, half of interested organizations have AOE of more than $750,000.

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 proposals that will deliver meaningful arts and culture experiences provided by organizations with annual operating expenses of more than $750,000.

Background

Engaging with the arts—whether creating or consuming art or practicing cultural traditions—builds a sense of connection among participants or within community; reinforces cultural identities; and improves community livability and resilience.[1] However, we acknowledge that these experiences and benefits are unevenly distributed to individuals and in communities, especially those that have been historically under-resourced (i.e., communities of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, and members of disability communities). To address this inequity, we are particularly interested in supporting programming that is designed, developed, and presented in ways that are relevant and welcoming to these communities, resulting in greater access to arts and culture experiences in Philadelphia and the region.

"Art often anticipates transformations that have not yet occurred, serving as a space of imagination and possibility. At the same time, it preserves memories of struggles and achievements, ensuring that the history of change is not forgotten."[2]

—

[1] Rugg, G. & Novak-Leonard, J. (2021). The Outcomes of Arts Engagement for Individuals and Communities. NORC at the University of Chicago
[2] Bathory, Ilona. "ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION AND THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN HUMANITIES RESEARCH." European Review of Contemporary Arts and Humanities 1.1 (2025): 24-27.

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that connect more Philadelphians to high-quality arts and culture experiences that reflect the cultural diversity of the region and contribute to its vibrancy. We will prioritize support for performances, exhibitions, and other arts and culture projects designed to address historic inequities of access to arts and culture experiences.

We are requesting proposals for **projects up to two years in duration** that will increase opportunities for people across the region to engage with a range of high-quality arts and culture experiences. **This funding opportunity is for organizations with more than $750,000 in annual operating expenses (determined by the most recently completed fiscal year).** Projects should have activities beginning in or after August 2026. Proposed projects must focus on inclusive and equitable opportunities presented in welcoming ways to people with diverse abilities and backgrounds. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of applicants.

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. Proposals that include a "series" or multiple activities must be unified by a clear curatorial premise.

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. 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 amount of funding that projects may request. And while there is no absolute maximum amount that can be requested, the most competitive proposals will be those with total grant requests of under $300,000 (over two years). The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contributions that the project will make to the overall objective.

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. Applicants must also have annual operating budgets greater than $750,000.

Eligible applicants include:

- **Artist collectives**: a group of artists who come together to collaborate, share resources, and work towards common creative and/or social goals.
- **Arts and culture organizations:** organizations with a mission that centers on the creation, performance, and/or presentation of artistic and cultural programs and experiences.
- **Community-based organizations**: local, nonprofit groups that work to improve conditions for and directly serve the needs of their communities.
- **Public institutions:** government entities and agencies.

WPF funds the following disciplines: dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, media arts, music, musical theater, opera, multidisciplinary arts, theater, and visual arts. Organizations that are not primarily arts and culture organizations must have a history of high-quality artistic programming and the appropriate artistic staff.

Proposed projects should be publicly accessible and not for the primary benefit of artists or higher education communities.

The majority of our funding will be awarded to projects in the City of Philadelphia. However, projects in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties, and the City of Camden, NJ will also be considered.

Please note:
Projects focused on arts learning and exposure for youth should refer to the Arts Education objectives for potential eligibility and future funding opportunities.

*The Foundation **will not** fund a program/project that is currently supported through a William Penn Foundation grant.*

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.

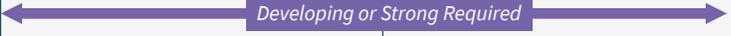| Key Questions:	YES	NO
Are your organization's annual operating expenses <u>more than</u> $750,000?	☐	☐
Does the project create a publicly accessible and culturally relevant arts and culture experience?	☐	☐
Are the intended beneficiaries primarily adults or multi-generational?	☐	☐
Is the project's conception, design, and implementation led by an artist or artistic team?	☐	☐
Does the project take place in the cities of Philadelphia or Camden, or Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties?	☐	☐
Please also review all of the criteria on the following pages and make sure that your program aligns with those.		

Definition of Terms

Community	A group of people having a particular characteristic in common. This can be based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geography, interest area, or another characteristic but should be defined by the applicant.
Community-centered programming	Programming is specifically designed to meet the unique needs, interests, and goals of a particular community. This type of programming prioritizes engagement, collaboration, and input from community members, ensuring that the programs are culturally relevant, inclusive, and responsive.
Culturally relevant	Considers the interests, experiences, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries. This typically begins with engaging stakeholders as co-creators to learn more about their backgrounds, cultures, and interests. (Also referred to as culturally responsive).
High-quality	Applies artistic excellence and knowledge to create experiences that are informed by the needs, desires, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries to generate benefits such as experiencing joy, building connection, and reinforcing cultural identities. It is well-executed and well-produced.
Intended beneficiaries	A group or community that a project, initiative, or organization aims to engage and positively impact. Identifying the intended beneficiaries helps ensure that the goals and strategies of the program are tailored to address the needs of those it aims to serve.
Welcoming	Deliberately and intentionally creating a friendly and inclusive atmosphere where individuals feel accepted, comfortable, and valued; to actively foster a sense of belonging for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be judged on the criteria below. *Applicants should address these criteria in their narrative responses to the application questions.*

Artistic and Cultural Practice			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
The role and/or skills of an artistic-cultural team is absent.	Artistic-cultural team does not play a conceptual or decision-making role in the creative experiences described and/or does not have relevant artistic-cultural skills or experience needed.	Artistic-cultural team has limited-to-developing relationship, or influence in shaping the creative experiences and goals described.	Highly skilled or trained artistic-cultural team is central to developing creative concepts and decision-making, and has demonstrated the relevant skills, knowledge, and practices to be effective and essential to its artistic field and community. ← *Strong Required* →

Orientation to Equity, Inclusion, and Access			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Articulates some knowledge, but no evidence of practices that address barriers to people engaging with the organization or project, does not create environments where people feel valued and included. Unclear approach to welcoming and usable programs for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.	Inconsistent use of practices that address barriers to engagement and create environments where people feel valued and included. Testing approaches to welcoming and usable programs for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.	Demonstrates consistent practices that address barriers to engagement and create environments where people feel valued and included. Increasing use of approaches that make programs welcoming and usable for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds. ← *Developing or Strong Required* →	Track record of embedded practices that address barriers to engagement, create environments where people feel valued and included, and consistently ensures programs are welcoming and usable for people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.

Understanding and Engagement of Intended Beneficiaries			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Intended beneficiaries are not clearly defined; community-centered practice or engagement is absent.	Provides minimal evidence of familiarity with intended beneficiaries or community-centered practices and plans for engaging them are sporadic and/or cursory.	Demonstrates some knowledge of intended beneficiaries and existing community-centered practices and includes deliberate mechanisms to engage and deepen these relationships and practices. ← *Developing or Strong Required* →	Clearly identifies its intended beneficiaries and demonstrates deep relationships and community-centered practices with these beneficiaries.

Design/Results Feasibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Unclear approach to the work, lacks project design and implementation details to achieve scope of work and results.	Conceptual approach to project design, implementation and results are vague, difficult to understand, or seem unrealistic.	Developed concept with tangible approach to project design and an implementation plan, with anticipated results that are informed by untested ideas and some past practices.	Detailed approach to the work with strong project design, implementation plan, and measurable results that are informed by past practices and evidence of success.

← *Developing or Strong Required* →

Organizational Capacity			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Lacks dedicated staffing with relevant experience/skills, leadership and organizational support, and resources.	Staffing with relevant experience/skills is reliant on unidentified project-based consultants/contractors, and project/organization has limited leadership and organizational support, and resources.	Staff and identified project-based consultants/contractors have relevant experience/skills, committed leadership oversight, organizational support, and sufficient resources.	Staff and long-term consultants/contractors have relevant experience/skills and extensive relationship with the organization, committed leadership oversight, organizational support, and sufficient resources.

← *Developing or Strong Required* →

Additional expectations:

Articulated Benefits	Proposal articulates the positive impact(s) it seeks to have on its intended beneficiaries and clear process for engagement.
Accessibility	Proposed work considers accessibility and accommodation, including the disabilities community, aging populations, low-income individuals and families, non-English speakers.
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and allocates adequate resources for the artists involved in the project.
Key Staff	Proposal includes information on key contracted artists, workshop facilitators, and/or producers of programming (pending or confirmed), in addition to key organization personnel.

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, March 25, 2026, at 11:00AM ET.**
>
> Register for the webinar at https://lu.ma/williampennfoundation

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to two 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 an organization's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, 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 submission system at https://wpf.my.site.com/grantee.

Submit your application by 5:00PM ET on **April 23, 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 **Program Officer Meghan Beals** at mbeals@williampennfoundation.org.*

Timeline

March 18, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

March 25, 2026

Informational Webinar (see page 10)

April 23, 2026

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

May 7-11, 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.

May 11-June 12, 2026

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

July 31, 2026

WPF Board reviews selected proposals.

August 2026

Project implementation can begin.