

**WilliamPennFoundation**

Request for Proposals

# Investment in Philadelphia Parks

Published June 17, 2026

Due July 30, 2026

William Penn Foundation  
Two Logan Square, Suite 1100  
100 North 18th Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
[williampennfoundation.org](http://williampennfoundation.org)



## 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, increase three-year average annual per capita park spending from \$86 to \$95<sup>1</sup> as tallied by the Trust for Public Land's ParkScore®.**

<sup>1</sup> Calculated in 2024 constant dollars to account for inflation.

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 be likely to increase investment in the Philadelphia parks and recreation system and may focus on advocacy, fundraising, increased volunteerism, policy or systems change, outreach and education, or other ways to advance the objective. Proposals may focus on increasing investments for a single park or across the City’s parks and recreation system.

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 8-9 of this document.

## **This RFP seeks project proposals that will help increase the amount of money invested in Philadelphia parks.**

### **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

A well-funded, well-maintained, and actively programmed parks and recreation system contributes to the quality of life of all Philadelphians. It contributes to the environmental, social, and economic health of our city.

One measure of the strength of a city's parks and recreation system is the ParkScore®, published annually by the Trust for Public Land (TPL). ParkScore is a comprehensive measure of the 100 most populous U.S. cities' urban parks systems. TPL and the ParkScore evaluate cities' parks systems based on five key criteria: access, equity, acreage, investment, and amenities. The score provides a standardized 0–100 ranking that allows for comparison and highlights strengths and gaps in public park access and quality. ParkScore reflects not just the quantity of parks, but also their distribution, quality, and equity of access. A higher ParkScore signals that a city is investing in public well-being, resilience, and community development — making it a valuable benchmark for policymakers, planners, and residents.

In addition to objectives focused on improving parks and public spaces, expanding programming in parks and other outdoor spaces, and increasing the number of urban trees, WPF has identified investment in parks as a key objective to improve residents' environments. We are using one of the calculations provided by ParkScore as a consistent, transparent, and publicly accessible metric of progress on this objective. To calculate total investment, ParkScore aggregates spending for publicly accessible parks and recreation facilities across all public agencies and private organizations, including monetized volunteer hours. To minimize the effect of annual fluctuations, investment in parks is reported as a three-year average based on the three most recently finalized fiscal years.

The Foundation's objective focused on increasing investment in parks was announced in 2024 and is based on the 2024 ParkScore, in which Philadelphia's park system was ranked 32nd nationally, earning a score of 57.5 out of 100. The city excelled in park access, with 95% of residents living within a 10-minute walk to a park. However, it lagged in investment, spending approximately \$86 per capita, below the national average of \$124. For comparison, Washington, D.C., which ranked first in park system quality, spent \$284 per person in 2024.

As of May 2026, Philadelphia improved its standing in the ParkScore ranking to 27th place, with a score of 63.9, and per capita investment of \$120 over the three-year average. Adjusted for inflation, that is about \$117 in 2024 dollars, a remarkable increase from 2024. Investments through the Rebuild initiative, the addition of amenities like recreation centers and splash pads, and growth in the percentage of residents with nearby park access all contributed to the increased score.

The progress from 2024 to 2026 highlights Philadelphia's commitment to enhancing its parks and recreation system, focusing on increased investment and accessibility. Park advocates argue that increased support, whether through dedicated city allocations, public-private partnerships, volunteerism, or innovative financing mechanisms, is critical to ensuring that all neighborhoods, particularly those historically underserved, have access to safe, well-maintained, and vibrant green spaces.



**If the City of Philadelphia was investing public funding into parks at the same level as Pittsburgh, our 2026 rank would improve from 27<sup>th</sup> in the nation to 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>2</sup> [Trust for Public Land - ParkScore](#)

# Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that will increase investment in Philadelphia's parks and recreation facilities. Proposals can include efforts to increase investment from public or private sources, develop or strengthen innovative community initiatives, expand volunteer efforts, or other projects that are likely to yield increased sustainable investments in our parks and recreation sites. Funding can support system-wide applied research, capacity building, communications, advocacy, coalition building, and other appropriate activities. Projects can focus on individual sites or across the entire parks and recreation system.

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

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. It is our aim to fund projects that have results that can be sustained over time. We seek proposals for projects that draw in new public and private constituents, employ new or innovative funding strategies, and/or target areas of the system or city that have been chronically under resourced. We are especially interested in proposals that explore or advance **dedicated public funding mechanisms** as well as **public-private financing strategies** that have proven successful and adopted by top-ranked ParkScore cities.

The Foundation does not favor any single funding model and welcomes creative approaches that reflect the specific context of Philadelphia's political, fiscal, and community landscape. Examples of the kinds of investment strategies we hope to see advanced include, but are not limited to:

- *Dedicated parks tax levies or millage increases, as used in cities like Atlanta, Denver, and San Diego*
- *Municipal parks endowments or conservancy-managed endowment funds*
- *Special Service Districts or Business Improvement Districts that direct funds to adjacent parks*
- *Green bonds or infrastructure bonds earmarked for parks and recreation*
- *Percent-for-parks requirements tied to real estate development*
- *State or federal grant capture strategies*
- *Expanded public-private partnership models*

After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations. All proposals that meet the review criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has \$2 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that organizations may request. However, **grant requests under \$500,000 will be most competitive**. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

## 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 should have a strong likelihood of increasing investment in municipally owned parks, recreation centers, and playgrounds in the city of Philadelphia.

**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.

	YES	NO
<b>Is your project likely to increase funding for parks and recreation centers in Philadelphia?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Will your project result in a measurable, sustainable increase in public or private investment in parks — rather than a one-time contribution?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Does your proposal include a clear strategy for how increased investment will be maintained beyond the grant period?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is your organization a 501(c)3 nonprofit or a government agency?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please also review all of the criteria below 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.
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.
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.
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.
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.

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.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	
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.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	

**Additional expectations:**

<b>Sustainability of Impact</b>	Proposals that include a clear, credible plan for sustaining results beyond the grant period will be more competitive.
<b>Innovation</b>	Proposals that introduce a novel approach or funding mechanism not currently in use in Philadelphia, with a clear plan to document and share learning, will be more competitive.
<b>Replicability</b>	Proposals that make a compelling case for how the model could be scaled or replicated across Philadelphia's parks and recreation system, with a concrete plan to share findings, will be more competitive.
<b>Leverage</b>	Proposals that make a compelling, well-evidenced case for how WPF funding will unlock significant additional funding, with realistic projections and committed or likely funding commitments identified, will be more competitive.

# 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, June 23, 2026 at 3:00 PM ET.**

Register for the webinar at <https://lu.ma/william penn foundation>

# Budget

Project budgets should cover up to two years 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.

This RFP will **not** be funding capital expenses or any construction costs. All other aspects of project development and execution, including planning, materials, communications, outreach, and staffing, 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 submission system at <https://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>.

Submit your application by 5:00PM ET on **July 30, 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 Jazmine da Costa at [jdacosta@williampennfoundation.org](mailto:jdacosta@williampennfoundation.org).*

# Timeline

## June 17, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

## June 23, 2026

Informational Webinar (see page 10).

## July 30, 2026

Proposals due by 5:00 PM ET.

## August 12-17, 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.

## August 17-September 14, 2026

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

## October 23, 2026

WPF Board review selected proposals.

## November 2026

Project implementation can begin.