

**WilliamPennFoundation**

Request for Proposals

# Increasing Voter Participation

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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 quality of life for residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation's Democracy and 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 and 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 advance the following objective:

**In Philadelphia's 2031 general election, voter turnout increases, compared to 31% in 2023. In Pennsylvania's 2032 presidential election, voter turnout in communities of color increases to the same level as overall voter turnout.**

In contrast to relatively high voter turnout in recent high-profile presidential elections, most state and local elections see low levels of voter engagement. Key nonpartisan stakeholders have told us that their work to increase voter participation faces many challenges, including skepticism about the value of voting, inaccessible election processes, incorrect or misleading information about voting, and a lack of consistent funding for trusted messengers to do the year-round outreach and education that would enable citizens to overcome these and other barriers. This RFP seeks to address these challenges by funding projects that will reach eligible voters currently underrepresented in the electorate.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways that organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective including (but not limited to) nonpartisan outreach, organizing, voter education, advocacy, research, polling, communications, and/or journalism. With that understanding, this RFP imposes few limitations on the approach that applicants may take. 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.

### **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 projects that will support eligible Pennsylvanians, especially those who are underrepresented in the electorate, to exercise their right to vote.**

# Background

Through the Democracy and Civic Initiatives program, WPF seeks to build trust and participation, particularly among underrepresented communities, in Pennsylvania’s democratic processes. Elections are a keystone of our system of government. However, voter participation rates are often low, especially among certain demographic groups. The Foundation seeks to support nonpartisan efforts to increase the number of eligible Pennsylvanians who vote, especially members of underrepresented groups.

Trends from 2020 to 2024 show that some demographic groups are much less likely to turn out than others. According to the Pew Research Center, factors like race, age, and educational attainment continue to be strong predictors of whether or not an individual will turn out to vote. Citizens who are under 30 years old, have lower levels of formal education, or are non-White are less likely to turn out to vote each year and less likely to vote consistently across multiple elections outside of major Presidential elections.<sup>1</sup>

In Philadelphia’s 2025 elections, 34% of registered voters took part in the election. This was the highest participation rate in a decade for an election that did not include a candidate for mayor, governor, or president. While that improvement should be celebrated, it means that only one third of the over 900,000 registered Philadelphians voted in an important election that included candidates for State Supreme Court.<sup>2</sup>

**In Philadelphia’s 2025 elections, turnout rose to 34%, the highest level in a decade for an election with no mayoral, gubernatorial, or presidential candidates.**



<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. (2025, June 26). [1. Voter turnout, 2020-2024. Pew Research Center.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Moselle, A. (2025, November 5). [Philly voter turnout rose to 34% this election — the highest in at least a decade. Here’s why. WHY.](#)

# Opportunity Overview

WPF seeks to support nonpartisan efforts that will increase the number of eligible Philadelphians who vote, increase voting in Pennsylvania’s communities of color, or both. The most competitive proposals will focus on people who are regularly underrepresented in the electorate, including groups defined by race, age, income, educational attainment, disability status, geography, or other factors that have been shown to predict lower rates of voter participation.

We are requesting proposals for **up to 24 months of funding for activities taking place between December 2026 and December 2028**. 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.

Furthermore, the Foundation recognizes that there are many different approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. All proposals that meet the review criteria described on pages 7-8 are encouraged.

If your proposed work is in one of the categories below, please note that some specific information must be provided in the application narrative (in the course of responding to the application questions). Proposed activities are not required to be in any of the categories below.

Type of Activity Proposed	Information that must be included in proposal narrative
<b>Direct Voter Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expected actual voter contacts (not only attempted contacts)</li> <li>• Engagement outside of the period immediately preceding an election</li> <li>• Tracking method for engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Media, Digital, or Content Creation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current readership or viewership numbers</li> <li>• Expected impact of your work</li> <li>• Number of content creators, type of content creator engagement (paid or volunteer)</li> </ul>
<b>College or Campus Organizing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established partnerships with universities</li> <li>• Tracking method for engagement</li> </ul>

<b>Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment strategy for events, particularly how you will reach underrepresented communities</li> <li>• Tracking method for attendance and follow-up</li> <li>• Approach to post-event engagement, if any</li> </ul>
<b>Advocacy or Systems/Policy Change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The specific policy, regulation, or system that you aim to change</li> <li>• The number of voters likely to be affected by such a change</li> <li>• Your assessment of the likelihood of change during the grant period</li> </ul>

WPF has a total of \$2.5 million available to advance this objective. At least half of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that have budgets under \$2 million per year and/or are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion. **The maximum amount an organization may request is \$500,000 for 24 months. However, grant requests under \$350,000 over 24 months will be most competitive.** The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective. Proposed projects must occur in Pennsylvania.

### 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.

Please note: William Penn Foundation is strictly nonpartisan and funds only charitable activities as defined by the Internal Revenue Service. As a private foundation, we cannot earmark funds for voter registration. Therefore, **voter registration activities are not eligible for funding** through this RFP and should not be included in the project budget or the description of project activities or results.

**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. **Please also review all of the criteria on the following pages and make sure that your program aligns with those.**

<b>Key Questions:</b>		<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Are you proposing a project that <u>does NOT</u> include voter registration activities?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is your project non-partisan?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is your project likely to increase voting by communities underrepresented in Pennsylvania elections and/or increase overall voter turnout in Philadelphia?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Have you defined the geography and/or populations where you plan to focus your work?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Do you have experience working with the communities you intend to reach?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Do you have a method for tracking engagement with your intended beneficiaries?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<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 and considerations:**

<b>Intended Beneficiaries</b>	Clearly identifies its intended beneficiaries and demonstrates deep relationships with these beneficiaries.
<b>Geography</b>	A description of where project activities will take place is included. Projects that intend to work across large or dispersed geographies should describe the organizational capacity that supports their ability to work across large geographies.
<b>Coordination with Similar Efforts</b>	Projects that demonstrate coordination, and avoid duplication, with other voter engagement efforts will be given priority.
<b>Evidence of Effectiveness</b>	Proposals should describe how the applicant assesses their work to increase voter participation, and what evidence is used to determine impact and inform adjustments to the approach.
<b>Budget</b>	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.

# 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, June 24, 2026, at 3:00 PM ET.**

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

# Budget

Project budgets should cover up to 24 months of funding. Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any regrants to partner organizations or fees to 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 submission system at <https://wfp.my.site.com/grantee>.

Submit your application **by 5:00PM ET on Thursday, 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 90 minutes to two hours in duration. We ask that organizations use this time to introduce key staff working on the proposed project, to show us 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.

*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 Steve Preston** [spreston@williampennfoundation.org](mailto:spreston@williampennfoundation.org).*

# Timeline

## June 17, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

## June 24, 2026

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

## July 30, 2026

Proposals due by 5:00PM 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 reviews selected proposals.

## November 2026

Project implementation can begin.