

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Reducing Barriers to Training for Quality Jobs in the Philadelphia Region

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Photo: Rebuild Philadelphia

Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to improve the quality of life of residents of Philadelphia. However, the quality of life of many city residents is negatively impacted by persistent high rates of poverty and the significant income divide between White households and Black and Brown households. To reduce poverty in Philadelphia and support economic mobility for more Philadelphians, the Foundation’s workforce training and services grantmaking is focused on helping Philadelphians prepare for, access, secure, and keep quality jobs that provide pathways to long-term economic mobility. A full description of the Workforce Training and Services program and its objective can be found on the Foundation’s website. This specific Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations to advance the following objective:

By 2035, 10,000 individuals with high barriers to employment will complete workforce training and transition to employment, and 85% will still be employed after 12 months.

The Foundation and its funding partners recognize that there are many ways that organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project designs or applicants' approach to addressing this issue. For example, proposals may focus on direct service, policy or system change, or other ways to advance the objective and make tangible improvements in economic mobility for individuals living in the Philadelphia region. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or may seek to make change on a citywide or regional scale.

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 7-9 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.

WPF is excited to partner with 4 other foundations to advance this objective. Along with WPF, lead support for this RFP has been provided by Comcast. Additional significant support has been provided by Connelly Foundation, Green Family Foundation, and Philadelphia Foundation. By collaborating on this RFP, these funders have increased the total amount of funding available to support workforce development in our region and have simplified the application and reporting processes for prospective grantees.

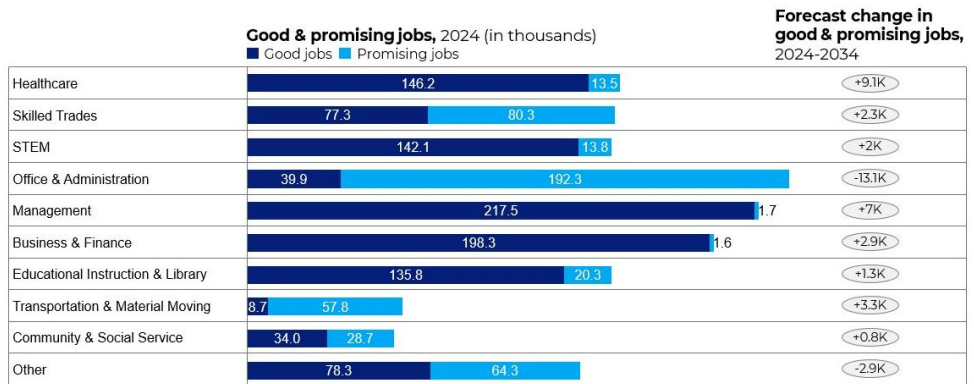
Background

Workforce development practitioners point to a range of barriers that often prevent individuals from accessing and completing training programs that could lead to higher-paying jobs and economic mobility. Experts suggest that an effective approach to addressing these barriers is for workforce programs to combine paid career training with “wrap-around” support, also referred to as supportive services.

This funding opportunity will focus on improving the capacity of proven and promising training programs and providing flexible funding for wraparound and navigation supports (e.g., coaching, housing referrals, childcare coordination) to improve job seekers’ training completion, employment placement, retention, and advancement in quality jobs with strong pathways to upward economic mobility. This funding opportunity is also a key contribution to ongoing efforts across the city to improve economic mobility. Strengthening pathways to quality jobs is a core pillar of that work. Given developing momentum on this topic, we believe that through working in concert with others it will be possible to connect tens of thousands of residents with quality jobs in the next decade.

The Philadelphia region missed out on about 70,000 “opportunity jobs” between 2012 and 2023, which are jobs that provide family-sustaining wages and benefits or a pathway to achieving them.¹

Share of & projected change in good¹ and promising² jobs by sector



1. “Good Job” refers to a job that pays above the Living Wage for a household of two working adults with two children (\$32.88) per hour according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator for the Philadelphia Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as of Feb 2025 —and offers employer-sponsored health insurance to a greater share of workers in that occupation in the Philadelphia MSA than the national average access rate to healthcare benefits of 74% (2023). | 2. “Promising jobs” are those jobs that do not meet criteria for “good jobs” but for which Opportunity@Work has identified pay more than 2/3 of the national median wage, are accessible to those without a Bachelor’s degree, and allow those without a Bachelor’s degree to transition to higher-pay roles.

Source: Analysis prepared by McKinsey and Co. data from Lightcast, Bureau of Labor Statistics, MIT Living Wage Calculator, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019-2023; Opportunity@Work

What is a quality job?

While definitions vary, WPF is interested in supporting workforce training efforts that prepare individuals for jobs that provide:

- A family sustaining wage with benefits that promote economic mobility
- Fair and reliable scheduling practices and safe and healthy working conditions
- Career ladders and potential for advancement
- An inclusive organizational and management culture

¹Barker R., Gootman M., & Jones A. (2026). *From Potential to Prosperity: A Strategic Agenda for Growth and Opportunity in Southeastern Pennsylvania*. Brookings Metro.

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation and its funder partners seek to support efforts that expand the effectiveness of high-quality workforce training by funding the supportive services that reduce barriers to accessing and completing workforce programs, transitioning to quality employment, and successfully completing the first year of employment.

This funding opportunity **will not** support organizations that are new to workforce training. Funding awarded through this opportunity will be directed to organizations with a track record of success in workforce development and will help programs to better address gaps and ensure even more success for training participants. Whether organizations directly train and place jobseekers or work on systems change efforts, competitive proposals will be able to quantify the projected increase in the number of individuals who will connect to supportive services, complete training, transition to, and retain quality employment as a result of grant funding.

We are particularly interested in initiatives focused on:

- linking supportive services with established high-quality job training to address barriers and ensure more individuals complete training and obtain quality employment with strong advancement prospects;
- enhancing coordination and collaboration between job training programs and social service agencies providing supportive services;
- advancing public policies that can tackle systemic barriers to training access and completion; and
- engaging employers to strengthen hiring practices and address and remove barriers to employment placement.

We are requesting proposals for projects **up to three years** to reduce workforce training barriers in the Philadelphia region. 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, particularly partnerships with employers and social service providers.

The Foundation and its partners recognize 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 and its funding partners anticipate awarding a total of \$6.55 million to advance this objective. Five million dollars of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations operating in the City of Philadelphia and serving Philadelphia residents. The remaining \$1.55 million will be awarded to programs serving residents in any area of the five-county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties). While there is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that organizations may request, **grant requests under \$1 million will be most competitive**. For direct service proposals, we will consider the number of people likely to complete training and the barriers that will be successfully addressed with participants as key factors for final amounts awarded.

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.

Projects connecting individuals to short-term or other temporary employment (e.g. summer internships) are **not eligible** for funding under this RFP. Projects focused on career exposure or exploration are also **not eligible** for funding. In addition, requests to support core technical training infrastructure (e.g. space, equipment, staffing) are **not eligible** for funding under this RFP.

Projects eligible for funding under this RFP will provide supplemental services and supports to established job training programs so that those programs can have better success in participant completion and transitions to quality employment.

All projects must focus on supporting individuals in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties.

Please note: existing grantees currently receiving funding to advance this objective cannot request additional funds for their current projects. Organizations currently funded by WPF to advance this objective are eligible to apply to this RFP for a different project.

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
Does your project serve residents of the 5-county region of Southeastern PA (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your project do at least one of the following: provide supportive services directly to participants in a job training program; coordinate supportive services between social service agencies and job training programs; enhance public policy to address barriers to training access and completion; and/or work with employers to reduce barriers to job training completion and quality employment placement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your organization have a track record of success directly preparing and placing individuals in high-quality jobs or facilitating individuals’ successful training completion and placement in quality employment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has your organization successfully helped trainees address barriers to completing training for and/or sustaining employment in quality jobs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your organization a public charity or government entity?	<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
Proposed activities are unrelated to the objective.	Proposed activities may advance the objective, but strength of connection is unclear.	Proposed activities will make a clear but indirect contribution to advancing the objective.	Proposed activities will make a clear and direct contribution to advancing the objective.
Program Design and Development			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No specific plans, program approach, or partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.	Limited or unclear plans, program approach, or partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.	Moderate or promising plans, program approach, or partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.	Strong plans, program approach, and partnership strategy for identifying and providing needed supports for populations facing high barriers.
Organizational Performance and Experience			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No implementation experience and no track record of success with barrier removal and/or with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.	Limited experience (less than 1 year) and limited track record of success with barrier removal and/or with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.	Some experience (1-5 years) and a track record of success with barrier removal and/or with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.	Deep experience (5+ years) and a track record of success with barrier removal and with high quality workforce training that connects graduates to employment.
Partnerships and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No partnerships or coordination experience with relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs.	Relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs identified but there are no clear commitments or formal partnerships. No or limited experience providing program and service coordination leadership.	Some existing partnerships and connections to relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs and a clear plan to build new partnerships to fill gaps in needed resources. Some experience in providing program and service coordination leadership.	Demonstrated partnerships or commitments from relevant service providers, public agencies, and/or complementary programs and a strong track record in program and service coordination leadership.

Community Outreach and Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Organization has not involved people with lived experience (i.e., knowledge and understanding gained from personal experience) in the design or management of proposed activities.	Organization has minimally or episodically involved people with lived experience in the design of proposed activities.	Organization has a clear plan to involve people with lived experience in the design of proposed activities.	The design of the organization's proposed activities is informed by and led with involvement of people with lived experience.

Employer Partnerships			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No formal employer partnerships described in proposed activities.	Proposed activities include informal employer partnerships, with occasional or episodic trainee placements for projects with direct service components.	Proposed activities demonstrate efforts underway to develop formal employer partnerships, with a pipeline of jobs and feedback mechanisms to address barriers limiting workforce entry, retention, and advancement for projects with direct service components.	Proposed activities include strong employer partnerships, with a demonstrated pipeline of high-quality jobs in place that pay a family sustaining wage for projects with direct service components.

Accessibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Proposed activities do not include considerations to ensure accessibility for all participants (e.g., location, timing, language, physical environment, etc.).	Proposed activities include some accessibility considerations.	Clear and specific efforts are being made to make proposed activities accessible, given the population of individuals being served.	Proposed activities take place in a highly accessible location(s), during convenient times, with no cost barriers to participants, and with consistent availability of language access.

Additional expectations:

Addressing Barriers	The most competitive proposals will speak to the specific barriers being addressed through supportive services and the anticipated impacts on job seeker training completion, employment placement, or retention in employment from addressing these barriers.
Budget Feasibility	The most competitive proposals will include budgets that are commensurate with the proposed activities and stated results.
Data and Outcomes Tracking	The most competitive proposals will include a clear plan to track and report outcomes, including the number of workers placed into jobs, job placement rates of job seekers upon program completion, and the 12-month retention rate of these workers at their employers. The most competitive proposals will also demonstrate a plan to use this data for continuous improvement.
Evidence of Partnership	Applicants working with outside agencies (e.g. employers, social service agencies) must provide letters of support documenting partnership commitments.
Growth Sectors	Proposals that focus on employment within five essential employment sectors will be given additional consideration. These sectors are: healthcare, biomedical/life sciences, shipbuilding/defense, enterprise digital solutions, and precision manufacturing.
Job Placement	The most competitive proposals will provide quantitative evidence of the organization's track record of placement and retention of trainees in high-quality jobs.
Organizational Capacity	The most competitive proposals will include an implementation plan that includes existing and new staff, if needed, professional development, technology, data management, and other organizational resources to deliver the proposed services and/or activities.

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 1:00PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to three 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 a participating organization's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, 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://wpcf.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](#).**

Applicants are also required to provide additional information about their proposed project. Applicants should complete the [Program Information Attachment](#) for each project applying for funding and upload it as an attachment in the grant portal. The attachment requests brief information about:

- Project Activities
- Barrier(s) to be Addressed
- Data and Outcomes Tracking
- Partnership Detail

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 Stephanie Waller at swaller@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

June 17, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

June 23, 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 review selected proposals.

November 2026

Project implementation can begin.