

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Out-of-School Community-based Arts Education Programs

Published September 9, 2026

Due October 22, 2026

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Photo: The Village of Arts and Humanities Ile Ife Creative Youth Showcase

Purpose of this Request for Proposals

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 Arts and Culture program seeks 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 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:

By 2035, at least 75,000 youth ages 5-18, who would otherwise have little or no access to high-quality, hands-on arts learning, will benefit from WPF-funded in-school partnerships and community-based initiatives across the Philadelphia region.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Studies have demonstrated that arts education allows young people of all ages to connect to their own creativity, to stretch their imaginations, and express their personalities. It also develops social-emotional and critical thinking skills¹ and helps youth build empathy and connections to others and the world around them.² Thoughtfully designed and delivered arts education can act as a safe space, allowing young people to share personal stories, process conflict and trauma, and develop interpersonal and cultural awareness. These opportunities can also help older youth gain skills needed in post-secondary education and the workplace.³



Photo: Gapura Spring Concert at FDR Park

While the benefits of high-quality arts education are many, the opportunities are not evenly distributed, and these gaps are particularly pronounced for youth coming from low-income households where barriers of cost and reliable transportation impede their access. Community-based arts education programs have designed models where arts education is offered to young people in their neighborhood where they have greater access and opportunity to benefit from creative learning.

The value of this work was highlighted in the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance’s 2024 report on its Cultural Dynamics collaborative research initiative designed to inform the City of Philadelphia’s cultural planning, where one of its recommendations was to: *Recognize the long history of local arts education, mentorship, and relationship-building that exists locally in the City, fully fund it, and embed this unique asset into public life—from schools and libraries to parks to transit.*

What types of projects will get funded?

The Foundation seeks to support out-of-school arts education opportunities in community-based settings for young people across the Philadelphia region to participate in equitable, inclusive, and high-quality, hands-on arts education led by skilled teaching artists.

In particular, we are most interested in prioritizing support for programs that are culturally relevant and make it possible for youth to engage as leaders and drivers of their own learning experiences. We seek to fund programs that are youth-informed or youth-centered, as developmentally appropriate.

¹ Daniel H. Bowen, Jay P. Greene, and Brian Kisida. (January 2014). “Learning to Think Critically: A Visual Art Experiment,” *Educational Researcher* 43 (1). pp. 37–44.

² Jay P. Greene, Brian Kisida, and Daniel H. Bowen. (Winter 2021). “The Educational Value of Field Trips,” *Education Next* 14 (1).

³ Kylie Peppler, Maggie Dah, and Mizuko Ito. (2023). *The Connected Arts Learning Framework: An expanded view of the purposes and possibilities for arts learning.* The Wallace Foundation.

- A program may focus on a single or multiple arts disciplines as long as it is hands-on arts learning led by skilled teaching artists and arts educators.
- Programs must exclusively serve children between ages 5 and 18.
- Programs are to be offered at little or no cost to the youth/families/caregivers, reaching primarily (75% or more) young people coming from low-income households.

Please note: Two Arts Education RFPs are scheduled over the next twelve months. **This RFP is for out-of-school programs offered in community-based settings.** An RFP to support in-school partnership programs offered during the school year will be released in December. See the table on pages 11-12 for a description of the differences between these two models.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for projects **up to three years in duration** to connect young people in the Greater Philadelphia region with out-of-school arts education opportunities in their communities. The arts education opportunities should be driven by the young people's creativity and interests and support their personal development and growth. These programs will primarily engage youth outside of school time and offer opportunities to pursue arts learning at any point during the year, including the summer.

Applicants should provide a clear, high-level narrative describing the program's model and design. The application narrative should include the:

- artistic discipline(s) the program teaches.
- history of the program and its experience working with youth of the proposed age range.
- teaching artists who lead the program, and their level of training and experience.
- learning and development pathway.
- amount of time the typical youth participant engages with the program.
- ways in which program design empowers youth to drive their own learning.
- other details you want to share about the program that describe how it works.

Applicants are also required to provide information by completing an Arts Education Program information form for the one or more sites included in the funding request. **Please upload the completed form as an attachment** in the online grant application portal.

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.

Quick Check: Is This Opportunity a Good Fit?

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
Does the program exclusively serve youth ages 5- to 18-years old from Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania and/or the City of Camden, NJ?	☐	☐
Has the program run successfully for at least two consecutive years?	☐	☐
Is the program led by experienced teaching artists?	☐	☐
Does the program predominantly serve children from low-income households (75% or more of youth reached)?	☐	☐
Does the program provide arts education during out-of-school hours, over multiple weeks?	☐	☐

! Also review **all** the criteria on the following pages to make sure your program aligns with those before you apply.

What types of organizations are eligible for funding?

Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Applicants must have a history of offering at least two consecutive years of successful arts education programs in the Philadelphia region. Eligible organizations include:

- **Arts education organizations:** community art schools, community youth arts organizations, creative youth development organizations, and arts and education collaboratives that work to make high-quality arts education accessible for Philadelphia area youth.
- **Arts and culture organizations:** arts and culture organizations with dedicated high-quality arts education programs committed to advancing arts access for Philadelphia area youth.

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: The Foundation will not fund a program/project that is currently supported through a WPF grant.

Proposal Review

! Applicants must address these criteria in their responses within the Project Narrative section of the application. Proposals will be judged on the criteria and additional expectations below.

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.	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.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	
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.	Clearly identifies its intended beneficiaries and demonstrates deep relationships and community-centered practices with these beneficiaries.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	

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.
			
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.
			

What else will be expected in my proposal?

Artistic Discipline Focus	Program should teach dance, design, folk and traditional arts, creative writing/spoken word, media arts, music, opera, theater arts, visual arts, or any combination of these artistic disciplines as its primary focus. Secondary learning goals can be present in the program, but consideration of funding will be based on the strength of the arts education.
Artistic-cultural Team	The artistic-cultural team implementing the program is made up of skilled teaching artists with at least two years of experience teaching, and professional biographies of teaching artists are included to share their level of experience and history of practice.
Partnerships	Programs that include organizational partnerships to identify youth participants and connect youth to additional programs and supports will be most competitive.
Defined Youth Outcomes	Proposal clearly describes how program model achieves the desired impact (such as skills and interest in the arts and/or social-emotional development) for youth.
Recruitment of Youth	Proposal clearly describes existing outreach strategies to engage youth participants.
Reach	Programs designed to serve upwards of 50 youth each year will be most competitive; if the program is designed to reach fewer than 50 youth, the number of contact hours for these youth should be proportionally higher and more in-depth.
Dosage	Dosage and frequency are appropriate for stages of youth development and learning. Recommended ranges are after school 2-5 days/week, 4-10 hours/week; Summer 4-5 days/week, 4-8 hours/day.
Duration	Programs must provide multi-week sessions, enabling youth to participate over a period appropriate for supporting their learning and development.
Budget	The requested budget should be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and allocate adequate resources for paying teaching artists and artists involved in the project.

Budget

How much money is available?

WPF has \$3 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 \$450,000 (total over 3 years) will be most competitive**. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets should cover up to three years of funding. Organizations are encouraged to build on their existing programs, using WPF funding to supplement or enhance those efforts. Individual scholarships are not eligible for funding through this RFP. Budgets should be designed to enable the participation of any interested youth. 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.

Anything else I should know?

If you are awarded funding, you will be expected to complete a brief written report each year describing how you have made progress toward the objective above and what you have learned during the year.

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.

How to Apply

If you answered “yes” to all the questions in the “Quick Check” on page 5 and meet all the review criteria on pages 6–7, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>.

Submit your application by **5:00 PM ET on Thursday, October 22, 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 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 **Senior Program Officer Hillary Murray** at hmurray@williampennfoundation.org.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at 11:00 AM ET**.

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

Timeline

September 9, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

September 16, 2026

Informational Webinar (see bottom of this page)

October 22, 2026

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

November 11-16, 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.

November 16-December 14, 2026

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

February 5, 2027

WPF Board review selected proposals.

February 8, 2027

Project implementation can begin

Definition of Terms

Culturally relevant: Program design reflects awareness, understanding, and response to the beliefs, values, customs, interests, and social structures of young people.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) (also referred to as socio-emotional development): The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships, among other skills and capacities related to self-awareness and self-control that can positively impact both life and school outcomes.

Out-of-school programming: Programs that young people can attend when school is not in session and are not tied to in-school partnerships during the school day.

Two Arts Education Program Model RFPs

	Out-of-School Community-based Programs (This RFP)	In-School Partnership Programs
RFP Schedule and Timing	RFP release: Sept. 9 Applications due: Oct. 22 Board decision: early Feb. 2027	RFP release: Nov. 18 Applications due: Jan. 21, 2027 Board decision: late April 2027
Artistic Discipline	Dance, Design, Folk and Traditional Arts, Creative Writing/Spoken Word, Media Arts, Music, Opera, Theater Arts, Visual Arts.	Same
Program Operations	Arts instruction and mentorship take place in community sites during out-of-school, including afterschool, school vacations, and summers. Standalone field trips and ticketed performances are not eligible.	Arts instruction and mentorship take place in schools in partnership with classroom teachers and specialists, including arts integration and enrichment during the school day, and extended day or afterschool. Standalone field trips and ticketed performances are not eligible.
Defined Youth Outcomes	Proposal clearly describes how program model achieves the desired impact (skills and interest in the arts, social-emotional development) for youth.	Same
Recruitment of Youth	Community-based outreach and networks, word of mouth and school/agency referrals.	School-based access

Program Timing	Out-of-school	School year, school day and/or extended day or afterschool
Accessibility	Accessible community-based locations including youth arts centers, arts organizations, community centers and neighborhood schools and may include off-site field trips as part of program. Takes place during convenient times for youth and families.	Accessible neighborhood schools serving students from low-income households (75% or more) and may include off-site field trips as part of program. Program is integrated into the school day, and/or extended day or afterschool.
Ages Served	Grades K-12, ages 5- to 18	Same
Reach	Programs designed to serve at least 50 youth each year will be most competitive	Programs designed to serve at least 100 students each year will be most competitive.
Dosage	Dosage and frequency as appropriate for stage of youth development and learning. Range may include afterschool 2-5 days/week, 4-8 hours/week; summer 4-5 days/week, 4-8 hours/day.	Dosage and frequency as appropriate for stage of youth development and learning, and school requirements. Range may include in-school 1-4 days/week, 1-2 hours/week
Duration	Multi-week sessions, at any point during the year.	Multi-week sessions, within school year.
Start Date	Grant funded work can start March 2027	Grant funded work can start May 2027, programming begins in 2027-2028 school year.
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and allocates adequate resources for paying teaching artists and artists involved in the project.	Same