

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Arts and Culture Capital Support

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Due October 22, 2026

William Penn Foundation
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Philadelphia, PA 19103
williampennfoundation.org



Photo credit: Halkin Mason, The Clay Studio Gallery Space

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, 125 WPF-funded capital projects will enhance existing arts and culture spaces that are vital to their artistic fields and communities, making spaces safe, accessible, and welcoming to people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Arts and culture spaces play a pivotal role in strengthening the social and cultural fabric of our communities. These spaces are integral to the overall artistic programming experiences that provide the people of Greater Philadelphia with opportunities for civic engagement and deep community connections, creative expression, and well-being; affirm cultural or community identity; and contribute to the vitality, economy, and livability of Greater Philadelphia's neighborhoods.

Well-designed, well-maintained spaces can elevate new approaches to programming, engagement, and business models, leading to greater resilience and growth in the arts and culture sector. To provide high-quality arts and culture experiences in the Philadelphia region, there is also a great need for accessible spaces that are inclusive of communities, audiences, and artists who have traditionally not been reflected due to ability differences, economic inequity, social injustice, or discrimination.



Photo: The Colored Girls Museum

What types of projects will get funded?

The Foundation seeks to support projects that improve existing arts and culture spaces to connect more people across Greater Philadelphia to high-quality arts and culture experiences. We are most interested in prioritizing projects that make it possible for everyone in the region to enjoy arts and culture experiences in spaces that are designed and equipped to be safe, welcoming, and engaging.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective, so there are few limitations on project design or approach. A project may, for example, focus on universal or human-centered design; address safety and accessibility improvements; enhance public and community use; make improvements necessary to maintain or improve the function of the space; or other ways to advance the objective. All projects must be designed to provide greater access to arts and culture experiences that are accessible to the general public.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for projects **up to two years in duration** for capital improvement of a space that is currently owned by the applicant, or improvement of a space under a long-term lease held by the applicant (leases must have at least 8 years remaining). Projects may also address one-time major equipment purchases, including but not limited to technology that supports artistic production and presentation, safety, and accessibility.

All submitted proposals should describe:

- the existing arts and culture space to be improved and its artistic, cultural, and civic value to the region, including confirmation of ownership or lease terms.
- the scope of the proposed capital improvements or equipment purchases and how they will make the space safer, more accessible, and more welcoming.
- the project's intended beneficiaries and the applicant's existing relationship and engagement practices with that community.
- the role of the artistic-cultural team in shaping the project's development.
- how the project sustains or builds on the organization's prior William Penn Foundation funding.
- a compelling explanation of how the proposed work will make a tangible improvement in advancing arts and culture opportunities for more people in Philadelphia and the region.

All proposals that meet the criteria described on pages 7-8 are encouraged.

Organizations that propose projects in partnership with other applicants will be considered on their individual merits. However, the Foundation and its partners recognize that the work necessary to make significant progress on the objective will be complex and encourages organizations to include partnerships that leverage complementary strengths, resources, and expertise.

This RFP seeks project proposals that will support improvements to existing physical spaces in which arts and culture organizations provide accessible, equitable, and inclusive experiences.

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 project improve your existing, dedicated arts and culture space to make the space safe, accessible, and welcoming to people of diverse abilities and backgrounds?	☐	☐
Has your organization received funding from the William Penn Foundation in the past 10 years?	☐	☐
Can your organization confirm that it has no active grants from WPF to support capital projects?	☐	☐
Do you own your space, or have at least 8 years remaining on a long-term lease with appropriate site control or owner approval for proposed modifications?	☐	☐
Is your space in the cities of Philadelphia or Camden, or in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties?	☐	☐

! 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 been awarded a William Penn Foundation grant within the past 10 years – since October 2016. Grantees currently on their first WPF grant must have completed at least one year of that grant.

Applicants must currently own their proposed physical space or hold a long-term lease for a minimum of the next 8 years with appropriate site control or owner approval for proposed modifications.

Eligible organizations include:

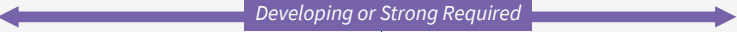
- **Arts and culture organizations:** organizations with a mission centered on the creation, performance, and/or presentation of artistic and cultural programs and practices that are inclusive, equitable, and have social impact.
- **Youth-centered arts education organizations:** community art schools, community youth arts organizations, and creative youth development organizations that work to make high-quality arts education accessible for youth ages 5–18.
- **Organizations with dedicated arts spaces:** organizations with a physical space intended for artistic-cultural programs and practices, used solely for the creation, performance, and/or presentation of high-quality works open to the public.

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

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 knowledge and practices to be effective, and essential to its artistic field and community.
			Strong Required
Organizational Strength			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Vague or unformed plan for future operations.	Stable financial health with limited plan to develop resources for expanded program/activity.	Stable financial health with moderately clear approach to business model, gaps in budget and resources.	Strong financial health, equipped with business model, necessary assets, and resources to sustain expanded program activity.
			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.
			Strong Required
Orientation to Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility			
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.
			
Promotes Stewardship of Existing Cultural Assets			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Institution is not an existing cultural asset for the community or region.	Represents an existing cultural asset for the community or region with limited community-engaged programs; the project will benefit the institution overall.	Represents an existing cultural asset and demonstrates knowledge of inclusive engagement and existing practices to benefit community and institution overall.	Represents an existing cultural asset with track record of inclusive engagement and benefit to community or region.
			
Leverages a Prior Foundation Investment			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No prior WPF investment.	Historic but no recent WPF investment.	Recent* but modest WPF investment.	Recent* major WPF investment.
			

*** Awarded within past 10 years**

What else will be expected in my proposal?

Public Benefit	Project addresses safety, accessibility, or welcoming and inclusive practices for its intended beneficiaries and its community. Projects must benefit the audiences for artistic productions and cannot be for the exclusive benefit of artists.
Project Description	Project identifies explicit project management staffing and oversight, contractors involved, and a timeline for the proposed scope of work. If part of a larger capital effort, the proposal articulates a clear description of the project's phase of prioritization in the master plan and timeline.
Budget	Project budget includes documented evidence of reasonable and informed cost assessments. If additional funds are required for completion, the applicant describes a feasible and active fund development plan.
Contribution to Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and contribute to other Arts and Culture or WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.

Budget

How much money is available?

WPF has \$6 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that organizations may request; the amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution the project will make to the overall objective. However, **grant requests under \$750,000, and projects in spaces owned by the organization, will be most competitive.** At least \$1 million 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.

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets may include up to three months for planning. Organizations are encouraged to build on their existing capital projects and investments, 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.

All aspects of project development and execution — including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, and implementation — are eligible for funding. Except in rare circumstances, total funding from WPF should not exceed 25% of a participating organization's operating budget.

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.

WPF also works with Green Building United to provide optional, free, hands-on technical assistance to grantees to ensure that sustainability and climate resilience are factored into capital projects. Free technical assistance is available in the planning, design, or early construction phases of a project, and can help organizations reduce operating costs, prepare for extreme weather, access financial incentives, and meet other sustainability goals. Organizations selected to advance beyond the written proposal stage will have the opportunity to learn more about this assistance during their site visit with WPF staff.

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 7–8, 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 Arts and Culture **Director Barbara Wong** at bwong@williampennfoundation.org.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Tuesday, September 15, 2026, at 3:00PM ET.**

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

Timeline

September 9, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

September 15, 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

Arts and Culture Space: Dedicated existing space that is designed to support creative expression, artistic and cultural practices including dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, media arts, music, museum, musical theater, opera, multidisciplinary arts, theater, and visual arts.

High Quality: Applies artistic excellence and cultural knowledge to create experiences that are informed by the needs, desires, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries.

Universal and Human-Centered Design: Universal design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of age, size, or ability. Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem solving that engages the people for whom a space or object is being developed to create results that meet their needs and priorities.

Intended Beneficiaries: A well-defined group that the organization aims to engage and positively impact through direct programming experiences.