

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Arts and Culture Programming

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William Penn Foundation
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Photo: The Colored Girls Museum exhibition featured in Creative Philadelphia's Art in City Hall program

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, 250 arts and culture programs or projects funded by WPF will be intentionally designed, developed, and presented to prioritize creative experiences and inclusive, welcoming practices to engage people of diverse abilities and backgrounds.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Engaging with the arts—whether creating or consuming art or practicing cultural traditions—builds a sense of connection among participants or within community; reinforces cultural identities; and improves community livability and resilience.¹

However, we acknowledge that these experiences and benefits are unevenly distributed to individuals and in communities, especially those that have been historically under-resourced (i.e., communities of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, and members of disability communities). As one of the Foundation’s core values, addressing this inequity means that we are particularly interested in supporting programming that is designed, developed, and presented in ways that are relevant and welcoming to these underserved communities, resulting in greater access to arts and culture experiences in Philadelphia and the region.

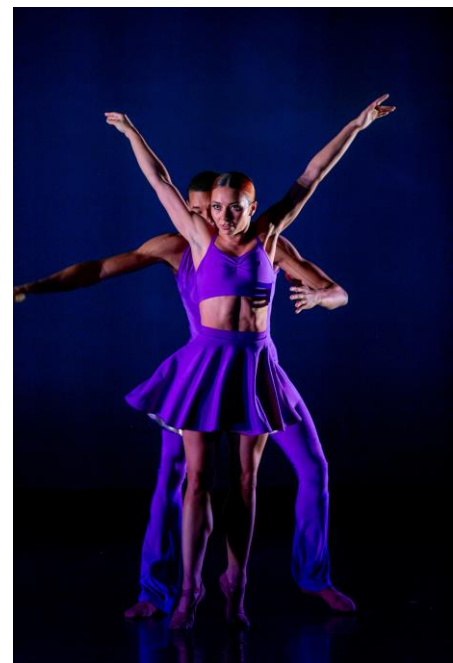


Photo: PHILADANCO!

What types of projects will get funded?

We are requesting proposals for **projects up to two years in duration** that will increase opportunities for people across the region to engage with a range of high-quality arts and culture experiences.

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.

WPF funds the following disciplines: dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, media arts, music, musical theater, opera, multidisciplinary arts, theater, and visual arts.

Funding will primarily be awarded to organizations that focus on one or more of the arts disciplines identified above. Organizations that are not primarily arts and culture organizations must have a history of high-quality artistic programming and the appropriate artistic staff.

Proposals may focus on one artistic discipline or be multi-disciplinary and may have a small geographic focus or seek to provide programming on a citywide or county scale.

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that connect more people to high-quality arts and culture experiences that reflect the cultural diversity of the region and contribute to its vibrancy. We will prioritize

¹ Rugg, G. & Novak-Leonard, J. (2021). The Outcomes of Arts Engagement for Individuals and Communities. NORC at the University of Chicago.

support for performances, exhibitions, and other arts and culture projects designed to address historic inequities of access to arts and culture experiences.

Please note:

- Proposed projects should be accessible to the general public and not for the primary benefit of artists or higher education communities.
- Projects focused on arts learning and exposure for youth should refer to the Arts Education objectives for potential eligibility and future funding opportunities. They are not eligible for this RFP.
- The Foundation will not fund a program/project that is currently supported through a William Penn Foundation grant.

What has to be in my proposal?

Projects should have activities beginning in or after February 2027. All proposed projects must:

- be designed and implemented by skilled artists and culture bearers.
- focus on inclusive and equitable opportunities presented in welcoming ways to people with diverse abilities and backgrounds.
- demonstrate an informed understanding of audience/intended beneficiaries.
- articulate a compelling explanation for how the proposed work will make tangible improvements in the quality of life for residents of Greater Philadelphia.
- unify any series of events or multiple activities with a clear curatorial premise.
- outline roles and responsibilities of partnership organizations in project design and/or implementation.

While partnerships with other organizations are not required, the Foundation encourages partnerships that leverage complementary strengths, resources, and expertise to reach proposed goals. You may include letters of commitment from key partners as attachments to your proposal. Organizations that propose projects in partnership with other applicants will be considered on their individual merits.

Proposals must meet the criteria and expectations described in the Proposal Review section on pages 6-7.

This RFP seeks proposals that will deliver meaningful arts and culture experiences provided by organizations with annual operating expenses of less than \$750,000.

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
Are your organization’s annual operating expenses less than \$750,000?	☐	☐
Does the project create a publicly accessible arts and culture experience?	☐	☐
Are the intended beneficiaries primarily adults or multi-generational?	☐	☐
Is the project’s conception, design, and implementation led by an artist or artistic team?	☐	☐
Does the project take place 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?

Please note: this RFP is only open to organizations with annual operating expenses (AOE) of less than \$750,000, based on the end of the previous fiscal year. This applies to the AOE of the lead organization implementing the project, not a fiscal sponsor. This RFP complements a previous RFP that sought proposals from organizations with an AOE of more than \$750,000. Those grants were awarded in July 2026.

Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. See [Fiscal Sponsorship Guidelines](#) for more information. Eligible applicants include:

- **Artist collectives:** a group of artists that have a standing history of collaborative projects, shared resources, and agreement to common creative and/or social goals.
- **Arts and culture organizations:** organizations with a mission that centers on the creation, performance, and/or presentation of artistic and cultural programs and experiences.
- **Community-based organizations:** local, nonprofit groups that work to improve conditions for and directly serve the needs of their communities.
- **Public institutions:** government entities and agencies.

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?

Accessibility	Proposed work considers accessibility and accommodation, including, but not limited to, the disabilities community, aging populations, low-income individuals and families, non-English speakers.
Articulated Benefits	Proposal articulates the positive impact(s) it seeks to have on its intended beneficiaries and clear process for engagement.
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and allocates adequate resources for the artists involved in the project.
Key Staff	Proposal includes information on key contracted artists, workshop facilitators, and/or producers of programming (pending or confirmed), in addition to key organization personnel.
Partnerships	If partnering with other organizations, proposal outlines roles and responsibilities of partners in project design and/or implementation. Proposals that speak to collaborative, durable partnerships and relationships that are mutually beneficial and deepen community impact will be most competitive.
Welcoming Practices	Proposal describes policies and programming approaches in place to intentionally create a friendly and inclusive atmosphere where individuals feel accepted, comfortable, and valued.

Budget

How much money is available?

There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that projects may request. However, previous grants range from \$30,000 per year to up to \$350,000 total, for terms of up to two years. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contributions that the project will make to the overall objective.

WPF has \$3.5 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. WPF values diverse approaches from various organizations and communities to address the objective and aims to attract and fund a range of projects. At least \$1 million of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that 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 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.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, professional development, and implementation are eligible for funding. Do not include overhead or indirect costs in the budget. If awarded, the Foundation will add up to 25% of the direct project costs funded by the Foundation.

Except in rare circumstances, total funding from WPF should not exceed 25% of a participating organization's operating budget. If using a fiscal sponsor, this percentage is calculated using the project lead organization's annual operating expenses, not the fiscal sponsor's.

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 **Program Officer Meghan Beals** at mbeals@williampennfoundation.org.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Thursday, September 17, 2026, at 3:00PM ET.**

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

Timeline

September 9, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

September 17, 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.

March 2027

Project implementation can begin

Definition of Terms

Community: A group of people having a particular characteristic in common. This can be based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geography, interest area, or other characteristics but should be defined by the applicant.

Community-Centered Programming: Programming is specifically designed to meet the unique needs, interests, and goals of a particular community. This type of programming prioritizes engagement, collaboration, and input from community members, ensuring that the programs are culturally relevant, inclusive, and responsive.

Culturally Relevant: Considers the interests, experiences, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries. This typically begins with engaging stakeholders as co-creators to learn more about their backgrounds, cultures, and interests. (Also referred to as culturally responsive).

High-Quality: Applies artistic excellence and knowledge to create experiences that are informed by the needs, desires, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries to generate benefits such as experiencing joy, building connection, and reinforcing cultural identities. It is well-executed and well-produced.

Intended Beneficiaries: A group or community that a project, initiative, or organization aims to engage and positively impact. Identifying the intended beneficiaries helps ensure that the goals and strategies of the program are tailored to address the needs of those it aims to serve.