

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Responsive, Accountable Local Government in Philadelphia

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Photo Credit: People's Budget Office

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 Democracy & Civic Initiatives program seeks to support collective and collaborative action toward a more engaged, participatory city and state. A full description of the Democracy & 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 to advance the following objective:

Philadelphians have confidence that local government is responsive to their needs and accountable to constituent priorities.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Philadelphians see the impact of local government on their lives every day. For example, local government determines whether trash gets picked up from the curb each week, how the schools are run, the cost of property taxes each year, and which local businesses are approved to open on a block. Despite the significant influence of local government on people's lives, a small minority of voters participate in local elections. Voter turnout is often below 35% in Philadelphia when it comes time to vote for Mayor, and it can be even less for other offices like City Controller or District Attorney.

Studies show that voters don't turn out to vote if they feel like the government doesn't take their opinions into account when making decisions.¹ In Pew's 2025 Resident Survey, 55% of Philadelphia residents who responded said they believe that city government "rarely or never" listens to people like them when it makes decisions about what to do.²



Photo: Love Park in Philadelphia

Through this funding opportunity, we hope to help Philadelphians have their voices better heard by local government. In this RFP, WPF is focusing on helping people – those who work within government and outside of it - to build a local government that is more responsive to the needs of Philadelphians. WPF tracks progress on the objective stated above through a periodic survey to understand change over time. You can see the [2025 baseline data](#) on our website.

What types of projects will get funded?

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that help Philadelphia's local government be responsive to residents' needs and accountable to constituent priorities. For the purposes of this RFP, "local government" includes:

- City of Philadelphia departments, agencies, boards and commissions
- All municipal elected officials
- The School District of Philadelphia

Projects may be developed and led by local government staff as an "inside" strategy for improvement, may be developed and led entirely by nonprofit organizations as an "outside" strategy, or may be a partnership between the two. We expect to fund a mix of inside and outside strategies through this RFP.

The Foundation recognizes that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. Some examples of proposals could include:

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¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/medill-npr-nonvoters-2020>

² <https://www.pew.org/-/media/assets/2025/06/prpi/2025-philadelphia-resident-survey-topline.pdf>

- City government staff engaging with community to make government more responsive to resident needs
- Advocacy for policy reforms
- Journalism or reporting to hold government accountable
- Technical support or assistance to government

Other tactics for advancing the objective are also welcome.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for **up to 24 months of funding**.

Successful proposals will describe the relevance of their project to the current local political climate, tactics for accomplishing change, and feasibility of achieving their goal.

Civic education efforts will not be funded unless they include strategies for participants to use newly developed knowledge and skills to make local government more responsive to residents during the grant period and after the grant period concludes.

If proposals seek to create a resource for a government agency or office, they must describe how you have determined the need for the resource, how it will be utilized, and who – within the relevant agency – has been involved in developing the project.

Proposed projects must occur in Philadelphia. **Voter registration activities are not eligible for funding.**

Successful proposals will describe the relevance of their project to the current local political climate, tactics for accomplishing change, and feasibility of achieving their goal.

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
Will your project make local government more responsive to the needs of Philadelphians?	☐	☐
Is your project entirely focused on the City of Philadelphia, an elected office in Philadelphia, and/or the School District of Philadelphia?	☐	☐
Has your project defined the change it is seeking to make in local government?	☐	☐
Does your project build on a history of engagement with the communities it intends to benefit?	☐	☐

! 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?

- Organizations recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups.
- Organizations operating under a public charity fiduciary.
- Government entities.

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.

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.
← Developing or Strong Required →			
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.
← Developing or Strong Required →			
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.
← Developing or Strong Required →			
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.
← Developing or Strong Required →			

What else will be expected in my proposal?

Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.
Coordination with Similar Efforts	Projects that demonstrate coordination and avoid duplication with other similar efforts will be given preference.
Partnership Status	Proposal must confirm whether organizational partners are committed or not. Projects with committed partnerships will be given preference.
Intended Beneficiaries	Proposal clearly identifies intended beneficiaries for programming and why they are the intended audience.
Participant Recruitment	For programs with participants, the selection and or recruitment process is clearly outlined.
Established Relationships	The most competitive proposals will have established relationships and a history of successful engagement with the beneficiaries the applicant intends to reach.

Budget

How much money is available?

The foundation has \$2.5 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. Any grant request through this RFP should be less than \$500,000. **While the maximum request amount is \$500,000, proposals requesting \$300,000 and under will be most competitive.**

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets should cover up to 24 months of funding. Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any regrants to partner organizations, stipends to participants, 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.

What if my proposal includes any advocacy or lobbying activities?

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:

- Show in the budget submitted by the applicant that the amount requested from the Foundation is less than 80% of the total project budget.
- 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.)
- 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.)
- 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.

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 Steve Preston** at spreston@williampennfoundation.org.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at 3:00PM 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