

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Preserving Urban Gardens and Farms in Philadelphia

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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 Environment and Public Space program seeks to improve and protect the natural and built environment in communities around the region. A full description of the Environment and Public Space 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, increase the proportion of urban garden parcels safe from development or legal threats from 44% to 75%.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Through the Environment and Public Space program, WPF seeks to protect Philadelphia's network of urban gardens and farms, which provide green space, food access, and community anchors in neighborhoods that need them most. According to research from the Philadelphia Garden Data Collaborative, fewer than half of the city's active garden parcels are currently secure from development or legal threats. The Foundation's support of efforts to preserve urban gardens and farms is rooted in feedback we received during our strategic planning process. These spaces are expressions of community pride, identity, and desire for self-determination.



Emerald Street Community Farm/Rob Cardillo for Neighborhood Gardens Trust

Philadelphia's 2023 Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root identified preserving existing growing spaces as a central community priority. Approximately 70% of the city's active urban gardens and farms are located in communities where more than 20% of residents live below the poverty level. These spaces enable communities to define and control their own food systems. The loss of carefully cultivated urban farms and gardens to development or speculation represents a direct harm to neighborhood health and resilience.

Despite their value, Philadelphia's urban gardens and farms remain vulnerable. Many occupy land their stewards do not own, leaving them susceptible to displacement by development, tax sale, or legal challenge. Effective stewardship is labor- and resource-intensive, and gardens can fall into disuse without sustained leadership and organizational support. The threat of displacement is most acute where development pressure is highest and where the communities most dependent on these spaces have grappled with decades of disinvestment and discrimination. Advancing permanent preservation requires addressing not only individual parcel insecurity, but also the systemic legal, financial, and political barriers that make securing land difficult for under-resourced community organizations.

What types of projects will get funded?

This RFP offers two funding tracks focused on securing existing, active urban gardens and farms in Philadelphia from development or legal threats. Applicants should apply under the track that best reflects their organization's role and capacity.

- **Track 1 — Project Grants:** Open to a wide range of organizations pursuing any strategy that advances garden preservation, including: direct acquisition of an identified **single project site** where they are the active land stewards, legal support, organizing, technical assistance, capacity building, and advocacy. Grants are available for one to three years. Requests under \$300,000 will be most competitive; requests up to \$500,000 will be considered for organizations with demonstrated capacity and compelling scope.

- **Track 2 — Land Trust Grants:** A dedicated track for established land trust organizations with demonstrated capacity to acquire, hold, and steward urban garden parcels in perpetuity. Designed to support responsive acquisition of **two or more project sites** where the land trust is not necessarily the garden operator. The parcels do not need to be identified at the time of application. Use of the funds in the future may include time-sensitive Sheriff Sale bids and private purchases alongside the operating investment needed to hold land responsibly in perpetuity. Grants of up to \$2,000,000 are available. This track has additional eligibility criteria and a higher bar for organizational capacity. See the Land Trust Grant Track section for full details.

This RFP offers two funding tracks focused on securing existing, active urban gardens and farms in Philadelphia from development or legal threats.

What has to be in my proposal?

Below we discuss expectations for each of the tracks defined above. For either track, we are requesting proposals for up to **three years of funding**. The appropriate project term will depend on the scope and complexity of the proposed work. Regardless of the track selected, all proposals must meet the criteria described in the “Proposal Review” section. **Applicants may apply under only one track.**

Organizations that propose projects in partnership with other applicants will be considered on their individual merits. The Foundation recognizes that the legal, relational, and organizational complexity of garden preservation often benefits from partnerships that leverage complementary strengths; for example, a community organization partnering with a legal services provider, a land trust, or a citywide advocacy coalition.

Track 1: Project Grant Track

The Foundation recognizes that a variety of projects can advance garden preservation and welcomes a range of responses to this RFP. This track includes, but is not limited to, proposals focused on:

- direct acquisition of existing, established, and actively managed urban garden and farm parcels **at a single project site**;
- legal support for adverse possession claims, Land Bank transactions, title resolution, or lease and governance structuring;
- strategies to reduce the number of community gardens and farms lost at Sheriff Sale or to private speculation;

- organizing and base-building that directly supports permanent land preservation for urban gardens and farms;
- technical assistance, capacity building, and stewardship support that positions gardens for long-term security;
- and policy and advocacy with clear and direct connections to parcel preservation outcomes.

All proposals in this track that include land acquisition should identify the parcel or parcels that are the focus of the proposed work; explain why those parcels are currently insecure; and explain how, why, and when the proposed work will result in those parcels becoming secure. A complete proposal for acquisition-focused work will include, at minimum:

- an explanation of the proposed pathway to security (e.g., Land Bank disposition, adverse possession, private purchase, Sheriff Sale acquisition, organizing, or legal support) and why it is feasible;
- roles and responsibilities of key partners, including any legal, technical, or organizational partners;
- a timeline for achieving security for the identified parcel(s) within or beyond the grant period, with a clear post-grant plan where applicable;
- a full picture of the resources including budget, staff, and volunteer capacity necessary to carry out the proposed work;
- and a [supplemental site form](https://williampennfoundation.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/GrantsSandbox/IQC6YS0oe8RyQIB4u1SXylaKAcaBUErvZtgDEZonDs2Aeok) for each parcel included in the proposal (<https://williampennfoundation.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/GrantsSandbox/IQC6YS0oe8RyQIB4u1SXylaKAcaBUErvZtgDEZonDs2Aeok>). After completing the form for the site, please upload it as an attachment in the grant portal.

Track 2: Land Trust Grant Track

This track is for established organizations with demonstrated capacity to acquire, hold, and steward urban garden parcels in perpetuity. Organizations applying under this track must be already actively acquiring and holding urban garden parcels in perpetuity and have the operational infrastructure to do so. This track is designed to support responsive acquisition at **two or more project sites**, including time-sensitive Sheriff Sale bids and private purchases, and the general operating investment needed to hold land responsibly over the long term.

To be considered under the Land Trust Grant Track, organizations must demonstrate all of the following:

- at least five years of operation as an incorporated 501(c)3;
- at least five completed parcel acquisitions with documented title transfer;
- demonstrated ability to hold land in perpetuity, including active stewardship agreements, insurance coverage, and a governance model for long-term land management;

- demonstrated understanding of the landscape of potential acquisitions and associated complexities;
- financial stability demonstrated by at least five years of audited or reviewed financial statements, a balanced or surplus operating budget, and organizational reserves covering at least three months of operating expenses;
- staff capacity or a contracted partner with demonstrated experience in real estate transactions, title review, and Philadelphia municipal land systems (Land Bank, Sheriff Sale, Orphan's Court);
- and a written acquisition strategy describing how the organization screens and prioritizes parcels, executes time-sensitive transactions, and manages post-acquisition responsibilities including tax compliance, insurance, and stewardship.

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
Is your proposed work focused entirely on existing and active urban gardens or farms in Philadelphia? (Note: empty and abandoned lots without active urban gardens are not eligible for funding)	☐	☐
Will your proposed work help secure one or more existing and active garden or farm parcels from development or legal threats?	☐	☐
Does your proposal prioritize parcels that communities have identified as high priorities for preservation?	☐	☐
Is the applicant a 501(c)3 nonprofit, operating under a fiscal sponsor, or a government entity?	☐	☐
Track 2 only: Does your organization have at least five years of operation as an incorporated 501(c)3, at least five completed parcel acquisitions, and the financial and operational capacity to hold land in perpetuity?	☐	☐

! 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. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible to apply.

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
Conveys no meaningful connection to the RFP objective.	Would make a marginal and/or uncertain contribution to advancing the RFP objective.	Proposed work would make a clear contribution to advancing the RFP objective.	Proposed work would make a clear and major contribution to advancing the RFP objective.
Developing or Strong Required			
Beneficiaries			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not identify expected beneficiaries of the project.	Identified beneficiaries of the project do not include prioritized communities.	Identified beneficiaries of the project include prioritized communities.	Prioritized communities will receive significant benefits from the project.
Developing or Strong Required			
Meaningful Community Awareness of Proposed Work			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful evidence of community awareness of, interest in, or demand for proposed work.	Minimal evidence of community awareness of, interest in, and/or demand for proposed work.	Meaningful evidence of community awareness of, interest in, and/or demand for proposed work.	Specific involvement of community members and/or community-based organizations in development of proposal.
Developing or Strong Required			
Meaningful Community Engagement in Proposed Work			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful community engagement included in implementation plan for proposed work.	Limited community engagement in implementation plan for proposed work.	Significant community engagement as audience for proposed work (e.g. outreach and education).	Substantial community engagement as both audience for and also implementers of proposed work.
Developing or Strong Required			
Partnership and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address partnerships that will be necessary for success.	Explains the partnerships that will be necessary for success, but does not identify specific partners or describe the role that partners will play in the proposed work.	Identifies specific partners, provides at least a general description of the role that they will play in the work, and includes letters of support from at least some of them.	Identifies specific partners, provides a detailed description of the role that they will play in the work, and includes letters of support from each of them.
Developing or Strong Required			

Organizational Capacity			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Insufficient evidence of leadership, resources, staffing, partnerships, and/or experience necessary to achieve project goals.	Evidence of leadership, resources, staffing and/or partnerships, but insufficient evidence of ability to successfully implement work of the type being proposed.	Evidence of leadership, resources, staffing and partnerships, and some experience with successful implementation of the type of work being proposed.	Evidence of all necessary leadership, resources, staffing, and partnerships in place to achieve project goal. Applicant and/or partners also have extensive experience with successful implementation of the type of work being proposed.
Developing or Strong Required			
Project Design and Feasibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not provide a clear, specific, or realistic approach to the work. Project outcomes and success are not clear and well-defined.	Provides a clear approach to the work, but some aspects of the approach are vague or seem unrealistic. Project outcomes are defined, but are of uncertain achievability, based on the details provided.	Provides a clear approach to the work and successful outcomes are defined and achievable. Some aspects of the project design may require further clarification to assess feasibility.	Provides a clear approach to the work, successful outcomes are defined and achievable, and the proposal includes a sound project design and feasible implementation plan.
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.
Threat Status	Proposals focused on parcels at clear and proximate risk of being lost, including those facing Sheriff Sale, tax delinquency, or market-rate development pressure, will be prioritized.
Acquisition Path	Proposals focused on parcels with a clear and feasible path to acquisition will be prioritized. Applicants should identify the specific legal or transactional mechanism being pursued and explain why it is viable given current ownership and parcel status. For non-acquisition proposals, applicants should describe the specific mechanism through which their work will result in parcels becoming secure.
Stewardship and Sustainability	Proposals that include evidence of garden stewardship and long-term sustainability will be prioritized. Evidence includes an active community of stewards with an articulated decision-making structure and demonstrated ongoing care and cultivation of the land (including stable water access).
Established Relationships	The most competitive proposals will have a documented history of stewardship at, or direct community connection to, the specific site(s) proposed, not just general engagement experience in the area.
Coordination with Similar Efforts	Projects should demonstrate awareness of and coordination with other relevant garden preservation efforts in Philadelphia, including those supported by WPF, to avoid duplication and build on existing relationships and infrastructure.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and contribute to other WPF Environment and Public Space program objectives , such as Climate Resilience, Community Greening, or Public Space Improvement, will be given additional consideration.

Budget

How much money is available?

For Track 1 Project Grants requests **under \$300,000** will be most competitive; requests up to \$500,000 will be considered for organizations with demonstrated capacity and compelling scope.

For Track 2 Land Trust Grants, requests **up to \$2,000,000** will be considered for organizations with demonstrated capacity and compelling scope.

The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

WPF has allocated a total of \$3,000,000 to advance this objective. Of that amount, approximately \$1,000,000 is reserved for Track 1 (Project Grants) and approximately \$2,000,000 is reserved for Track 2 (Land Trust Grants).

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets should cover one to three years of funding. 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. Parcel acquisition transaction costs should be included in the budget under 'Capital Expenditures' and are excluded from this calculation. All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, professional development, and implementation are eligible for funding.

Track 2 Land Trust applicants may request general operating support directly tied to land-holding responsibilities as part of their grant, as described in the Land Trust Grant Track section. General operating support is not available under Track 1.

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 7 and meet all the review criteria on pages 8 and 9, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>.

Submit your application by **5:00PM 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 **Jazmine da Costa, Senior Program Officer for Environment and Public Space** at jdacosta@williampennfoundation.org.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Tuesday, September 15, 2026 at 1:00PM 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

Community: A group of people sharing a geographic area, cultural identity, or common experience. In this RFP, community refers to the residents, stewards, and stakeholders who are connected to a garden or farm and whose wellbeing is tied to its preservation.

Community-Centered Stewardship: Stewardship practices shaped by and responsive to the people who use and care for a green space, including inclusive governance, equitable access, and active engagement of garden members in decision-making.

Displacement: The loss of access to land, green space, or community assets due to development pressure, rising property values, legal action, or policy decisions that fail to protect community use.

Existing and Active Community Garden/Farm: A garden or farm that has been continuously operating for at least two years, is actively maintained by more than one land steward or household, and shows evidence of regular cultivation or programming during the growing season. Gardens that have been dormant for more than one full growing season and land that has never been used as a garden or farm are not eligible.

Land Security: Legal or institutional protection of a parcel from development or sale, achieved through fee simple ownership, long-term lease, conservation easement, Land Bank disposition, or adverse possession.

Market Rate Development Pressure: The forces that drive private investment and development activity into a neighborhood, often resulting in rising land values, displacement of existing uses, and loss of community assets such as gardens and green spaces. In the context of this RFP, market rate development pressure refers to conditions under which garden parcels face increased risk of acquisition by private developers for housing, commercial, or other uses incompatible with community stewardship.