

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Increasing Urban Trees in Philadelphia

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Due October 22, 2026

William Penn Foundation
Two Logan Square, Suite 1100
100 North 18th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
williampennfoundation.org



Pennsylvania Horticultural Society volunteers plant trees across Philadelphia/Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

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 help improve and protect the natural and built environment in these communities. 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 number of trees by at least 35,000 across the seven Philly Tree Plan priority areas.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Healthy trees make a significant contribution to the quality of life of Philadelphia residents. Trees provide protection from heat, reduce air pollution, improve physical and mental health, and are an important asset for mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts.¹ Given these benefits, it is especially unfortunate that trees are not equitably distributed across the city, and that the urban forest is threatened by development, inadequate maintenance, and the effects of climate change.²

A comprehensive assessment of Philadelphia's tree canopy conducted in 2018 found that 6% of the city's tree canopy (the part of the land that is covered by tree leaves and branches from a bird's-eye view) was lost over the last decade. The assessment also illustrates the inequitable distribution of trees. Tree canopy covers 20% of all land across the city, but it ranges from less than 5% in some areas to more than 45% in others. Areas with fewer trees and less tree canopy tend to be lower-income and Black and Brown-majority neighborhoods that are also beset by other inequities. The quality-of life implications can be profound, as these areas often experience higher temperatures – sometimes up to a 22-degree disparity – and have worse physical and mental health outcomes.³

In response to these findings, the City launched a process to develop its first-ever strategic plan to make tree coverage more robust, equitable, and sustainable. Released in 2023 and informed by input from more than 9,000 residents, the Philly Tree Plan established a 10-year strategy for the equitable growth and care of Philadelphia's urban forest. Based on key environmental and socioeconomic factors, the Philly Tree Plan identified seven priority areas where an increase in tree canopy can provide the most benefit and recommends prioritizing these areas for investments to grow and care for the urban forest. WPF is releasing this RFP to help advance that plan.

What types of projects will get funded?

WPF seeks to support projects that contribute to increasing the number of trees in the priority areas of the Philly Tree Plan. Priorities include portions of West, Northwest, North, Kensington/Harrowgate, Northeast, South, and Southwest Philadelphia. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or seek to make change citywide, provided they demonstrate impact in one or more of the Philly Tree Plan priority areas. All proposals should align to one or more of the Philly Tree Plan sub-goals.

To identify the Philly Tree Plan's priority areas, please [use this map](#):

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/c0b572d8313b47e2bac75113f7e65130>.

¹ [Philly Tree Plan](#), February 2023, p. 3

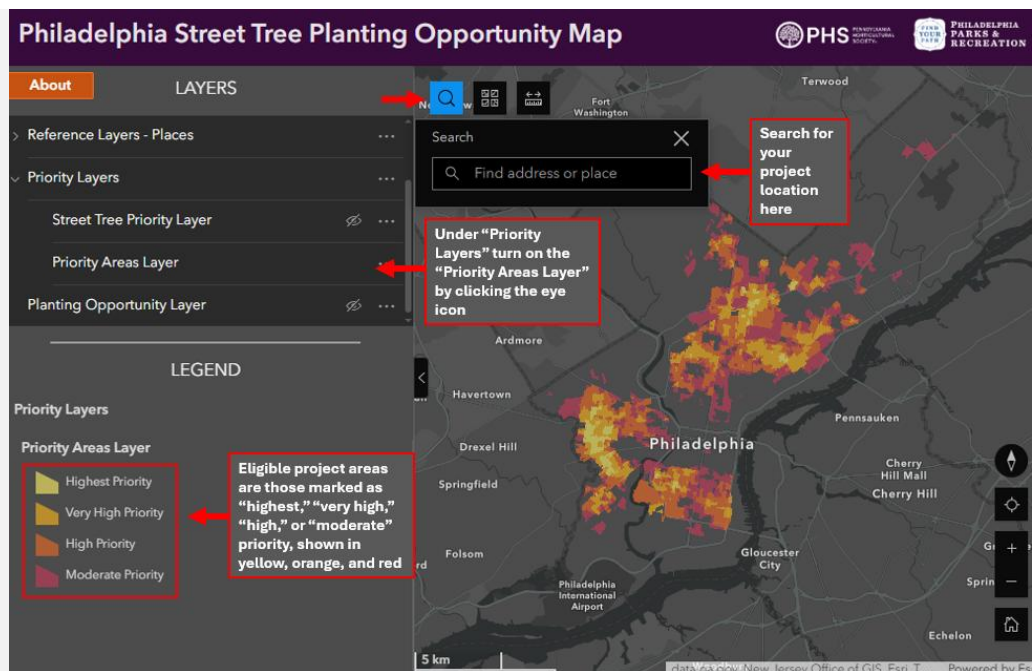
² [Philly Tree Plan](#), February 2023, p. 2-7

³ [Philadelphia Tree Canopy Assessment](#), Dec. 2019

Please note:

It is important that you turn on the “Priority Areas Layer” to view the priority areas relevant to this RFP. Refer to this screenshot for instructions on how to select the correct layer.

Philadelphia Street Tree Planting Opportunity Map.



All proposals that will improve the number of trees in areas labeled as highest, very high, high, or moderate priorities and address all of the factors described under the “Proposal Review” section below are encouraged.

The Foundation recognizes that multiple strategies or tactics can contribute to increasing the number of trees in Philadelphia by 2035, and we welcome a wide range of approaches in response to this RFP. Eligible projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Plant trees and provide establishment care, including along streets and in parks and private yards;
- Expand the number of trees planted or cared for through workforce development and volunteer engagement;
- Build community trust, awareness, and demand for trees through strategic communications or resident engagement;
- Resolve barriers to planting - such as hazardous tree removal, stump grinding, sidewalk repairs, or pre-screening sites to reduce denied tree requests - and follow through to register residents for trees or build interest in planting;
- Advocate for policy or funding changes to increase tree planting and care citywide, with significant impact in priority areas.

While this RFP invites proposals that support additional activities connected to tree planting, as these examples indicate, all proposals should articulate a clear connection between the proposed activities and the Foundation’s objective of adding 35,000 trees in priority areas of the Philly Tree Plan by 2035.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for **up to three years of funding**. Proposals should align to one or more of the Philly Tree Plan sub-goals. In describing the proposed work, all submitted proposals should, as applicable:

- Identify the priority area(s) where the proposed work will take place or have an impact. Please specify the neighborhood(s) and/or include a map showing the anticipated project location(s).
- Articulate how the proposed work seeks to advance or complement one or more specific sub-goal(s) of the Philly Tree Plan;
- Accurately estimate (to the maximum extent possible) the number of trees that will be planted;
- For proposed work that does not directly plant trees — such as community engagement, communications, or removal of barriers to planting — articulate measurable goals that connect the work proposed to an increase in the number of trees by 2035.

Proposals should align to one or more of the Philly Tree Plan sub-goals.

All proposals that include the elements described above and meet the criteria described in the “Proposal Review” section are encouraged.

Organizations that propose projects in partnership with other applicants will be considered on their individual merits. However, the Foundation recognizes 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.

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 project going to sustainably increase the number of trees in Philadelphia by 2035?	☐	☐
Is your project going to benefit at least one of the priority areas listed in the Philly Tree Plan?	☐	☐
Is your project going to advance or complement one or more of the Philly Tree Plan sub-goals?	☐	☐
Is the applicant a 501(c)3 nonprofit, operating under a fiscal sponsor, or a government entity?	☐	☐

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

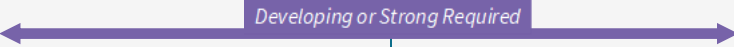
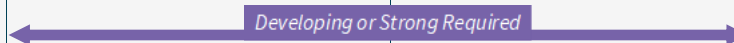
What types of organizations are eligible for funding?

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.
			
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.
			

What else will be expected in my proposal?

Alignment to Philly Tree Plan	Proposals should identify at least one specific Philly Tree Plan sub-goal that the work would advance or complement.
Connection to More Trees	Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the proposed work will contribute to new tree planting. For proposals that do <u>not</u> directly plant trees — such as community engagement, advocacy, communications, or efforts to remove barriers to planting — applicants must: • Identify the specific barrier to, or enabling condition for, new tree planting that the proposed work addresses; • Explain why addressing the barrier or creating this enabling condition is needed, using relevant evidence (community or stakeholder input, quantitative data, or other documentation); and • Define measurable goals that clearly link the proposed activities to new trees planted (e.g., tree requests generated) and their expected timeline.
Maintenance and Establishment Care	Proposals for tree planting projects should include strategies for care and routine maintenance to increase likelihood of tree survival over multiple years.
Budget	The requested budget should be reasonable for the proposed activities and stated results. Where applicable, the requested budget should include compensation for partner organizations and community participants for their roles and contributions.
Geography	Where proposals are otherwise similar in meeting all proposal review criteria and expectations, WPF will prioritize projects in the highest priority areas defined on the map referenced above.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to advancing other WPF Environment and Public Space program objectives , such as Community Greening, Climate Resilience, Public Space Improvement, or Green Stormwater Infrastructure, will be given additional consideration.

Budget

How much money is available?

Proposals in the range of **\$25,000 to \$900,000** will be most competitive. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

WPF has allocated up to \$3.2 million to advance this objective at this time.

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets may cover **up 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. 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 6 and meet all the review criteria on pages 7 and 8, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpcf.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 **Michele Perch, Senior Program Officer for Environment and Public Space** at mperch@williampennfoundation.org.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Thursday, September 17, 2026 at 1:00PM 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.

February 8, 2027

Project implementation can begin

Definition of Terms

Establishment Care: The consistent care required for newly planted trees during the first three to five years, which dramatically increases their chance of reaching maturity.⁴

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 project are tailored to address the needs of those it aims to serve.

Philly Tree Plan: To view an executive summary of the Philly Tree Plan, click [here](#). To view the full Philly Tree Plan, click [here](#).

Priority Area / Prioritized Community: Seven areas where, per the Philly Tree Plan, an increase in tree canopy can provide the most benefit and should be prioritized for investments in tree planting, care, and programming to achieve equitable tree canopy growth across the city. These areas were determined by tree canopy cover, heat exposure & vulnerability, air quality, health risk (asthma, mental health, cancer, income, and impervious surface). All priority area layers - highest, very high, high, and moderate - are eligible.

Tree: For the purposes of this RFP, WPF defines a tree as a woody plant planted in a permanent location in Philadelphia. Trees may include street, park, yard, schoolyard, community garden, or fruit and nut trees. This RFP is not intended to encompass bushes, shrubs, flowers, or general landscaping.

⁴ [Philly Tree Plan](#)