William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Arts Education School Partnership Programs

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Photo: Play On Philly

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, at least 75,000 youth ages 5-18, who would otherwise have little or no access to high-quality hands-on arts learning, will benefit from WPF-funded in-school partnerships and community-based initiatives across the Philadelphia region.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Photo: Mosaic created by Fleisher Art Memorial



Studies have demonstrated that arts education allows young people of all ages to connect to their own creativity, stretch their imaginations, and express their personalities. It also develops social-emotional and critical thinking skills[1] and helps youth build empathy and connections to others and the world around them.[2] Thoughtfully designed and delivered arts education can act as a safe space, allowing young people to share personal stories, process conflict and trauma, and develop interpersonal and cultural awareness.

Additionally, in-school arts education partnership programs can support students in their overall school experiences, having been shown to deepen students' engagement with school and decrease disciplinary infractions.[3] However, not all students experience the positive impact of arts education opportunities.

Here in Philadelphia, the inequities of access to arts education are present in a recent analysis conducted by the School District of Philadelphia. For example, in the 2024–25 school year, 75.2% of Black/African American students were enrolled in visual or performing arts, compared with 86.8% of White students, an 11.6-point gap.[4]

We hope to support in-school partnership programs that provide young people with hands-on arts education led by skilled teaching artists.

What types of projects will get funded?

The Foundation seeks proposals that will support in-school partnership programs for youth across the Philadelphia region to participate in equitable, inclusive, and high-quality arts education programs happening during the school year. In particular, we hope to support in-school partnership programs that provide young people with hands-on arts education led by skilled teaching artists implementing models that make it possible for youth to engage as leaders and drivers of their own learning experiences. We seek programs that are well tested, with a history of successful partnership experience (at least two years of implementation in at least two schools).

- Programs must exclusively serve children between ages 5 and 18.
- Programs are to be offered at no cost to a school or students.

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1 Daniel H. Bowen, Jay P. Greene, and Brian Kisida. (January 2014). "Learning to Think Critically: A Visual Art Experiment," *Educational Researcher* 43 (1). pp. 37–44.
2 Jay P. Greene, Brian Kisida, and Daniel H. Bowen. (Winter 2021). "The Educational Value of Field Trips," *Education Next* 14 (1)
3 Daniel H. Bowen and Brian Kisida. (Summer 2023). "The Fine Art of School Engagement," *Educational Next* Vol 23, No. 3.
4 School District of Philadelphia's "Goals & Guardrails Monitoring Report ‖ Guardrail 2: Well-Rounded Education" (August 2025)

- Programs must partner with schools where they are reaching primarily (75% or more) young people coming from low-income households.

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.

Please note: The Arts Education objective provides support through two RFP opportunities per year. **This RFP is only for programs offered through in-school partnerships.** The RFP deadline for out-of-school programs in community settings has closed for 2026 and will not be accepting additional applications at this time. See the table on pages 13-14 for a description of the differences between these two models.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for **projects that last from one to three years** and connect young people in Greater Philadelphia with in-school arts education partnership programs driven by the young people's own creativity and interests to support their personal development and growth. These programs are to supplement and not replace the important arts learning being implemented by certified art teachers in Philadelphia area schools. These programs will be implemented by teaching artists in partnership with classroom teachers and specialists.

This can include models ranging from arts integration and enrichment to afterschool arts clubs, to expand and broaden arts education for the region's young people. Conducted in schools, these programs will primarily connect to youth during the school day or afterschool hours at their schools. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

Photo: Mamadêlê Foundation



Successful Partnership Experience

This RFP seeks programs that are well tested, with a history of successful partnership experience and at least two years of implementation in at least two schools.

Applicants should provide a clear narrative describing the program's model and design. The application narrative should include the:

- Artistic discipline(s) the program teaches.
- History of the program and its experience working with youth of the proposed age range.
- Teaching artists who lead the program, and their level of training and experience.
- Learning and development goals a program has for its student participants.
- Amount of time the typical youth participant engages with the program.
- Ways in which program design empowers youth to drive their own learning.
- Practices the program employs to establish and maintain successful partnerships with schools.
- Other details you want to share about the program that describe how it works.

Applicants are also required to provide information by completing a School Partnership Information form for each school partnership site included in the funding request. **Please upload the completed form as an attachment** in the online grant application portal.

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.

All proposals that meet the criteria described on pages 7-8 are encouraged. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

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
1. Does the program exclusively serve youth ages 5- to 18-years old from Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania and/or the City of Camden, NJ?	☐	☐
2. Has your program run successfully for at least two years in at least two schools?	☐	☐
3. Is your program free for its school partners and student participants?	☐	☐
4. Is your arts education program offered through a partnership with a school(s)?	☐	☐
5. Does your program predominantly serve children from low-income households (75% or more)?	☐	☐

! 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 also have successfully completed *at least* two consecutive years of arts education programs in the Philadelphia region and worked in at least two different school sites during this time. Eligible organizations are limited to:

- **Arts education organizations:** community art schools, community youth arts organizations, creative youth development organizations, and arts and education collaboratives that work to make high-quality arts education accessible for Philadelphia area youth.
- **Arts and culture organizations:** arts and culture organizations with dedicated high-quality arts education programs committed to advancing arts access for Philadelphia area youth.

Please note: *The Foundation **will not** fund a program/project that is currently supported through a William Penn Foundation grant.*

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.
		Developing or Strong Required	
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.
		Developing or Strong Required	

What else will be expected in my proposal?

Artistic-cultural Team	The artistic-cultural team implementing the program is identified and professional biographies are provided for skilled teaching artists with at least two years of experience teaching.
Artistic Discipline Focus	Program should teach dance, design, folk and traditional arts, creative writing/spoken word, media arts, music, opera, theater arts, visual arts, or any combination of these artistic disciplines as its primary focus. Secondary learning goals can be present in the program, but consideration of funding will be based on the strength of the arts education.
Defined Youth Outcomes	Proposal clearly describes how program model achieves the desired impact (such as skills and interest in the arts and/or social-emotional development) for youth.
Partnership	Proposals that describe longstanding and well-developed school partnerships (at least two years) and have clear partnership plans will be the most competitive.
Duration	Programs are multi-sessions and build a pathway for continued engagement by youth.
Budget	The requested budget should be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and should allocate adequate resources for paying teaching artists and artists involved in the project.
Reach	Programs designed to serve upwards of 100 youth each year will be most competitive.
Dosage	Dosage and frequency as appropriate for stage of youth development and learning, and school requirements. Preference for programs that are a minimum of 1 hour a week.

Budget

How much money is available?

WPF has a total of $6 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that organizations may request. However, **grant requests under $450,000 (total over 3 years) will be most competitive**. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets should cover up to three years of funding. Organizations are encouraged to build on their existing programs, using WPF funding to supplement or enhance those efforts. Individual scholarships are not eligible for funding through this RFP. Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any regrants to partner organizations or fees to teaching artists/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.

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.

If awarded funding through a WPF grant, an organization agrees to not unlawfully discriminate in their employment practices, volunteer opportunities, or programs and services based on any characteristic or class that is protected by law.

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 7–8, 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, January 21, 2027**. 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.** Applicants are also required to provide site-specific information about their arts education school partnership program by completing a school partnership information form (linked here) to describe proposed project details for each school site included in the funding request.

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 **Senior Program Officer Hillary Murray at hmurray@williampennfoundation.org.**

Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Wednesday, December 2, 2026, at 3:00PM ET.**

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

Timeline

November 18, 2026
Proposal submission period opens.

December 2, 2026
Informational Webinar (see bottom of this page)

January 21, 2027
Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

February 12-17, 2027
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.

February 16-March 15, 2027
Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

April 30, 2027
WPF Board review selected proposals.

May 2027
Project implementation can begin.

Definition of Terms

Arts Integration: A model where the arts and the subject matter are taught concurrently, with learning outcomes for both holding equal importance. The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts further describes it as, "an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject and meets evolving objectives in both."[5]

In-school Arts Education Partnership: This term is used to define programs that take place during the school year and offered with school partner site(s).

Socioemotional Learning (also referred to as social-emotional development and abbreviated as SEL): The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships among other skills and capacities related to self-awareness and self-control that can positively impact both life and school outcomes.

Teaching artist: According to the Teaching Artist Guild's definition, teaching artists are practicing, professional artists […] who have dual careers as educators.

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5 Silverstein, L. B., & Layne, S. (2020, January 14). What is Arts Integration? Kennedy-Center.org.

Two Arts Education Program Model RFPs

	Out-of-School Community-based Programs (RFP to be released in September 2027)	In-School Partnership Programs (This RFP)
RFP Schedule and Timing	RFP release: September 2027 Applications due: October 2027 Board decision: February 2028	RFP release: November 18, 2026 Applications due: January 21, 2027 Board decision: April 30, 2027
Artistic Discipline	Dance, Design, Folk and Traditional Arts, Creative Writing/Spoken Word, Media Arts, Music, Opera, Theater Arts, Visual Arts	Same
Program Operation	Arts instruction and mentorship takes place in community sites during out-of-school time, including afterschool, school vacations, and summers. Standalone field trips and ticketed performances are not eligible.	Arts instruction and mentorship takes place in schools in partnership with classroom teachers and specialists, including arts integration and enrichment during the school day, and extended day or afterschool. Standalone field trips and ticketed performances are not eligible.
Defined Youth Outcomes	Proposal clearly describes how program model achieves the desired impact (skills and interest in the arts, social-emotional development) for youth.	Same
Recruitment of Youth	Community-based outreach and networks, word of mouth and school/agency referrals	School-based access
Program timing	Out-of-school	School year, school day and/or extended day or afterschool
Accessibility	Accessible community-based locations including youth arts centers, arts organizations, community centers and neighborhood schools and may include off-site field trips as part of program. Takes place during convenient times for youth and families.	Accessible neighborhood schools serving students from low-income households (75% or more) and may include off-site field trips as part of program. Program is integrated into the school day, and/or extended day or afterschool.

	Out-of-School Community-based Programs (RFP to be released in September 2027)	In-School Partnership Programs (This RFP)
Ages served	Grades K-12, ages 5- to 18	Same
Reach	Programs designed to serve at least 50 youth each year will be most competitive.	Programs designed to serve at least 100 students each year will be most competitive.
Dosage	Dosage and frequency as appropriate for stage of youth development and learning. Range may include: afterschool 2-5 days/week, 4-8 hours/week; summer 4-5 days/week, 4-8 hours/day.	Dosage and frequency as appropriate for stage of youth development and learning, and school requirements. Range may include: in-school 1-4 days/week, 1-2 hours/week.
Duration	Multi-week sessions, with year-round opportunities to participate	Multi-week sessions, within school year
Start Date	Grant funded work can start February 2028	Grant funded work can start May 2027, programming begins in 2027-2028 school year
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and allocates adequate resources for paying teaching artists and artists involved in the project.	Same