William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Community Greening Plans

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Photo Credit: Hinge Collective featuring Greener Partners, Belmont Alliance Civic Association, and The Center for Health Justice

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, establish and begin implementation of at least six community-driven plans to improve and expand green space.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Green spaces are assets in urban neighborhoods, providing a multitude of benefits such as reduced air and noise pollution, improved physical and mental health, and reductions in violent crime.[1] While the body of evidence demonstrating the social, economic, and environmental value of green space in cities is substantial, there is also considerable evidence that all urban communities do not have equitable access to the benefits of nature, and that this inequity is driven by the history and legacy of discrimination.[2]

This RFP will support community-driven processes that will establish plans to improve and expand green space in neighborhoods within the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, and Camden.

Initiatives intended to expand and improve green space in neighborhoods that lack these important assets can address this inequity, especially when communities are meaningfully involved in planning and implementation. When investments in green space are made without meaningful community involvement, they can lead to a reduced sense of belonging among long-time residents and an increase in property values, which often results in displacement of existing residents and businesses.[3] Community-driven planning processes, which value the expertise of community members and center their needs and interests, can help to deliver green space to neighborhoods while avoiding these potential negative outcomes.[4]

A sense of empowerment over changes in the neighborhood environment is significantly and positively associated with better mental health and higher levels of happiness and self-rated health among residents.[5]

What types of projects will get funded?

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that will establish community-driven plans focused on improving and expanding green space in the cities of Philadelphia and Chester, PA, and Camden, NJ. We invite proposals for work that will result in complete and implementable community greening plans by the end of the grant term. This RFP seeks to support planning processes that will explore or advance greening strategies at a neighborhood- or multi-neighborhood level. Projects that intend to develop a plan for one specific location or space are not eligible for funding.

Through this RFP, we anticipate funding projects that will initiate a new planning process or advance an existing planning process that was **not** funded through a previous WPF Community Greening Plans RFP.

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1 "Social perceptions of the value of green spaces: A view from the South," Frontiers in Sustainable Cities
2 "The Nature Gap," Center for American Progress
3 Jelks NO, Jennings V, Rigolon A. Green Gentrification and Health: A Scoping Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2021 Jan 21;18(3):907.
4 "Community-centered Solutions for Green Gentrification and Displacement," River Network
5 "Ownership of change: Participatory development of a novel latent construct for neighborhoods and health equity research," ScienceDirect

Existing WPF-funded community greening plan projects are ineligible for support through this RFP. Improving and expanding green space should be the primary focus of plans developed with support from this RFP. As this objective supports community-driven planning, we recognize that neighborhoods may have different priorities for their green space and that there are many tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above.

WPF will prioritize support for areas where no community greening plan has been established or is in development. WPF has provided support for community greening plans in the following areas: Belmont, Carroll Park, Cobbs Creek, Cobbs Creek Park, Elmwood, Francisville, Germantown, Haddington, Hestonville, Kensington (North of Lehigh), Kingsessing, Mill Creek, Nicetown, Paschall, Strawberry Mansion, Tioga, Walnut Hill, West Oak Lane, Woodland Avenue Commercial Corridor, and 52nd Street Commercial Corridor.[6]

While we will prioritize new geographies, proposals that focus on areas with an existing or in-progress plan are also eligible to apply and will be competitive in certain cases. Where projects are building upon a completed or in-progress plan, proposals should identify the existing plan or planning process, describe what has already been completed, and explain how the proposed work builds on it (for example, by extending it to adjacent areas, updating it, or addressing gaps) rather than repeating it. Proposals should also describe how they will involve the people and organizations behind the earlier effort.

Different Communities Have Different Priorities

As this RFP supports community-driven planning, we recognize that neighborhoods may have different priorities for their green space and that there are many tactics or approaches that could be used to advance this objective.



Photo: Community planning efforts in Kingsessing, West Philadelphia

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[6] For more information on the previous plans WPF has supported, see awarded grants on our website and filter by Objective: Community Greening Plans. Proposals that overlap with areas on this list are encouraged to apply if the proposed work is complementary.

Whether projects will initiate a new planning process or advance an existing planning process, projects should result in a **complete** and **implementable** plan by the end of the grant period. The table below describes the minimum required elements of a "complete and implementable plan" created with support through this RFP, additional activities that are eligible for support, and ineligible activities.

Minimum Elements of a Plan (Required)	• A summary of existing conditions and assets in the planning area, including existing green space, opportunities, and displacement risks. • Community-defined goals and priorities for green space, and a description of how residents identified those goals. • The greening strategies the community has chosen, and the priority areas or sites where they would be carried out. • A description of the partnerships, approvals from city agencies or property owners, and resources required for implementation (i.e., approximate budget estimates, staff or volunteer capacity). • An action plan with anticipated timelines, proposed governance structures to support community-led implementation, roles and responsibilities for key partners, and fundraising strategies.
Additional Eligible Elements/Activities (Optional)	Pre-development activities for priority sites or projects, such as: • site control and ownership research • feasibility and site assessments • conceptual and/or schematic designs developed with community input[7] • preliminary cost estimates • identifying required approvals and potential funding sources
Ineligible Elements/Activities	Site-specific detailed design or engineering work to prepare a particular location for construction, such as detailed design drawings, construction documents, or permitting.

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[7] Conceptual designs are rough sketches or diagrams that show two or three alternative ideas for a site, so that community members can compare options and choose among them. Schematic designs develop the chosen option in more detail, typically showing the layout, scale, and general location of features such as paths, plantings, and seating, along with a preliminary cost estimate. Neither includes the detailed drawings and technical specifications used to obtain permits or bid out construction, which are not eligible for funding through this RFP.

Applicants may request support for all aspects of the planning process, which may include but are not limited to outreach and education, communications, research, partnership-building, technical assistance, and community and stakeholder engagement. The table below outlines the phases and activities that may be included in a planning process, though this list is not exhaustive and is not intended to prescribe a particular approach to planning.

Phase	Activities may include:
Organize	Define the community; build relationships; identify stakeholders; build resident capacity; design how decisions will be made
Learn	Gather data; assess conditions, assets, opportunities, and risks; report findings back
Vision	Explore possible greening strategies; gather input to inform decision-making; set priorities and goals
Plan	Define strategies for achieving goals; outline resources needed and potential sources; bring in additional partners as needed; finalize the plan
Pilot	Early action or pilot projects that inform learning, visions, and plans (additional details below)

We will not fund implementation of plans through this RFP. However, we recognize that early visible action (e.g., pilot or demonstration projects) simultaneous with planning activities can generate trust, shape ideas, and build momentum that will result in successful implementation of the plan in the long-term. Applicants may allocate **up to 10%** of the total requested direct project costs for activities and/or pilot projects that are explicitly intended to build community trust and/or test approaches that could inform future implementation.

These pilot projects should be small-scale, near-term, and clearly connected to the broader planning effort. Examples of early action activities and pilot projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Small-scale greening projects, such as installation of temporary planters along a business corridor or a pollinator garden in a neighborhood green space
- Giveaways of plants and/or gardening materials to neighborhood residents
- Activation of neighborhood green spaces
- Paid training opportunities focused on green space maintenance

The types of activities and/or pilot projects do not need to be specified in the proposal, as we understand that this will likely be determined through the planning process. Proposed projects must occur in the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, or Camden.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for **one to two years of funding**. The appropriate project term will depend on the context in which you are working but should not exceed two years. Proposals should describe how the proposed work will establish a **complete and implementable plan**.

In describing the proposed work, all submitted proposals should describe:

- The geographic footprint of the plan and the approximate number of residents served.
- The community or population that the proposed project will serve, including relevant characteristics related to historical disinvestment.[8]
- The project deliverable that will be completed by the end of the grant term.

Organizations that propose projects in partnership with other applicants will be considered on their individual merits. However, the Foundation recognizes that making significant progress on the objective is difficult and encourages organizations to include partnerships that leverage complementary strengths, resources, and expertise to reach proposed goals.

All proposals that meet the criteria described on pages 9-10 are encouraged. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

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[8] To help inform this description, applicants may **optionally** reference data indicators such as demographic and socioeconomic data (e.g., U.S. Census/American Community Survey, CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index, HUD Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty) and environmental data (e.g. PennEnviroScreen, New Jersey EJMAP). These indicators are offered as optional reference points, not requirements. Applicants are also welcome to describe their community through other means, including local knowledge, community-based assessments, or direct experience working with the population served.

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. Is your project proposing a community-driven planning process that is primarily focused on improving and expanding green space?	☐	☐
2. Is your project focused on a clearly defined geographic area in the cities of Philadelphia, Chester, or Camden?	☐	☐
3. Is your project focused exclusively on planning (i.e., not implementation)?	☐	☐
4. Is your project going to produce a complete and implementable plan by the end of the grant term?	☐	☐

! 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	

Community Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
The proposal describes no engagement with the communities affected by the proposed work.	The proposal describes engagement with affected communities only in general terms, or describes it primarily as informing the community about the proposed work.	The proposal clearly identifies which affected communities will be engaged and how. Community members are involved in either shaping or carrying out the proposed work.	The proposal clearly identifies which affected communities will be engaged and how. Community members are involved in both shaping and carrying out the proposed work.
		Developing or Strong Required	

Partnership and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address partnerships that will be necessary for project success and completion.	Identifies specific partners necessary for project success and completion. Provides a general description of the role each partner will play in the proposed work.	Identifies specific partners necessary for project success and completion. Provides at least a general description of the role that they will play in the work. Includes evidence that the partnership relationship exists (e.g., documented prior collaboration).	Identifies specific partners necessary for project success and completion. Provides a detailed description of the role that they will play in the work. Includes evidence of each partner's commitment to that role (e.g., letter of commitment or MOU).
		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?

Historically Disinvested Populations	Proposals that primarily serve historically disinvested populations, including communities of color and low-income communities, will be most competitive.
Complete and Implementable Plan	Proposed projects should result in a complete and implementable plan (see page 5 for minimum requirements) by the end of the grant term. Once complete, the plan must be easily accessible to participants, partners, collaborators, and all potential beneficiaries. Proposals should fully describe the anticipated components of the completed plan.
Compensation for Partners and Community Members	Partner organizations and community participants should be appropriately compensated for their roles and contributions. For guidance on this topic, see Urban Institute's Equitable Compensation for Community Engagement Guidebook.
Budget	The requested budget should be reasonable for the proposed activities and stated results.

Budget

How much money is available?

The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the project's contribution to the community it seeks to serve. While there is no minimum or maximum grant request, **requests under $300,000 will be most competitive**. WPF has $1 million available to advance this objective through this RFP.

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets should cover one to two years of funding. Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any fees to partner organizations or consultants. Proposals may include funds to provide fair compensation to community members in exchange for their time and expertise. Proposals may allocate up to 10% of the total requested project funds to activities and/or pilot projects that are explicitly intended to build community trust, address urgent needs identified during the planning process, and/or test approaches that could inform future implementation (see page 6 for examples).

Except in rare circumstances, total funding from WPF should not exceed 25% of an applicant's operating budget.

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.

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 8 and meet all the review criteria on pages 9–10, 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.**

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 Alison Jones at ajones@williampennfoundation.org.**

Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Thursday, December 3, 2026, at 1:00PM ET.**

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

Timeline

November 18, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

December 3, 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

Community-driven planning: A process in which residents and other community members hold decision-making power and play a leadership role in designing the process, defining the community's priorities and goals, and deciding what is included in the final plan. Partner organizations and technical experts support and inform the work, but do not set its direction. A key component of community-driven planning is building the capacity of community-based organizations and residents to lead, so they are equipped to carry the plan forward.

Historically disinvested populations: Communities that have experienced sustained, systemic exclusion from public and private investment—including infrastructure, housing, and economic development funding—as a result of discriminatory policies.