William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Supporting Outdoor Programming

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William Penn Foundation
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williampennfoundation.org



Photo: Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory

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 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, support 50,000 participant program days of park, trail, and water programming.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Research demonstrates that time in nature provides a multitude of benefits to people, including improved health, well-being, and cognition.[1] But residents of urban areas have the least access to experiences in the natural world. Nationwide, communities of color are three times more likely than white communities to live in nature-deprived areas and three-quarters of residents in these areas have low household incomes. Because access to green space has significantly stronger protective health effects for people of lower socioeconomic status, those with the least access stand to benefit the most.[2]

This RFP will prioritize projects that serve communities that have experienced the greatest barriers to accessing the benefits of the outdoors.

Regardless of background or socioeconomic status, people want to access and enjoy the outdoors. Barriers – including safety concerns and lack of inviting spaces – often get in the way.[3] Programs that activate parks, trails, and water can help to lower some of these barriers by fostering a sense of safety, belonging, and joy among participants and building their connection to and care for shared outdoor spaces. Those spaces are enhanced in turn when more community members value and use them.

What types of projects will get funded?

For this RFP, eligible programs will connect people with outdoor or nature-based experiences in any setting (publicly or privately owned) that is safe, publicly accessible, and suitable for participant engagement. Existing and new programs are eligible; however, new programs must demonstrate especially strong demand from the expected participant population.

This RFP will prioritize projects that serve communities that have experienced the greatest barriers to accessing the benefits of the outdoors, including but not limited to communities of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, members of disability communities, queer communities, seniors, women and girls, young children, and others who have faced barriers to participation.

The most competitive programs will:

- Expand opportunities for meaningful outdoor engagement to people who face barriers to doing so.
- Respond to strong community interest or demand.
- Reach participants through effective outreach and trusted partners, with program leaders closely connected to the communities served.
- Be easy to get to, welcoming, and offered on a consistent, predictable schedule.

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[1] Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence - PMC

[2] The Nature Gap: Communities of Color and Those With Low Incomes Are Bearing the Brunt of America's Nature Loss - Center for American Progress

[3] Equity-of-Access-to-Trails-Market-Research-Fall-2020.pdf

- Draw on prior experience, research, or community knowledge to foster participants' sense of safety, belonging, and well-being in the outdoors.
- Invest directly in community members through paid or stipend roles.
- Foster lasting connections to the outdoors.

Proposals should demonstrate that program leads are trained and experienced in serving their communities and delivering safe, high-quality programs. Programs should be shaped by the communities they serve and benefit people who have historically had limited access to outdoor experiences. All programs must be offered at no cost to participants. The Review Criteria on pages 7-8 outline these expectations in more detail.

The following types of projects will **not** be eligible for funding:

- Projects that do not deliver programming directly to participants (this includes projects that are primarily advocacy, planning, communications/marketing, research, or capital improvement projects).
- Programs that take place primarily indoors (using indoor space as temporary weather backup is acceptable).
- Programs that charge a fee to participants.
- One-time or annual events, such as festivals or single-day celebrations that are not connected to recurring (e.g., weekly or monthly) programming proposed in the application.
- Organized competitive sports programs, such as leagues, tournaments, or races where competition or athletic performance is the main purpose.
- School day programs for students, except local field trips offered in conjunction with out-of-school programming at the same site.
- Programs in which participants are primarily spectators (e.g., musical or theater performances).
- Programs in which participants primarily provide labor (e.g., park clean-ups or planting events). Occasional stewardship activities integrated within a recurring outdoor program are acceptable.

Most of the funding will be awarded to projects in the City of Philadelphia. However, projects in the City of Camden, NJ will also be considered.

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for **one to three years** of funding. Applicants should provide a clear, high-level narrative describing 1-3 proposed program(s). The application narrative should include the following:

- Name(s) and description(s) of each proposed program (up to 3), including activities participants will engage in.
- Program goals and intended impact.
- Frequency and amount of time the typical participant engages with the program.
- How the program's activities depend on or engage with the outdoor setting.
- Brief description of health and safety procedures, including activity-specific risk management protocols and backup plans for heat, rain, or other weather.
- History of the program and experience working with the proposed activities and population.
- Staff who lead the program, and their level of training and experience.
- Other details you want to share about the program that describe how it works.

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.

Safety and Belonging in the Outdoors

The most competitive programs will draw on prior experience, research, or community knowledge to foster participants' sense of safety, belonging, and well-being in the outdoors.



Photo: Black Girls with Green Thumbs

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. Will the proposed work focus on engaging participants in outdoor activities through 1-3 programs, and be provided at no charge to participants?	☐	☐
2. Will your program(s) provide opportunities primarily to residents of the cities of Philadelphia, PA and/or Camden, NJ who have historically experienced limited access to the benefits of the outdoors?	☐	☐
3. Will your program(s) take place primarily in the cities of Philadelphia, PA and/or Camden, NJ?	☐	☐
4. Is the program in this proposal either not currently funded by WPF, or funded by a WPF grant that ends on or before August 31, 2027?	☐	☐

! 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.

Programs must primarily serve residents of the cities of Philadelphia, PA and/or Camden, NJ who have historically experienced limited access to the benefits of the outdoors. Programming must also take place primarily in Philadelphia and/or Camden.

Organizations with an active WPF grant may not request funding for a program supported by that grant unless the grant ends on or before August 31, 2027. Expanding a currently funded program to new sites, adding participants, or extending its season is considered the same program. Current grantees may apply for a different program. However, requests from organizations with active Outdoor Programming grants are likely to be less competitive given limited funds and the Foundation's desire to create opportunity for a broad range of organizations.

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?

Community Interest	Proposal demonstrates a clear interest or demand from current or potential participants, such as repeat participation, programs at capacity, or waitlists. New programs will be expected to show strong evidence that participants will attend.
Outreach & Recruitment	Proposal describes how participants will be reached, including details on staff time and resources outreach will require, and evidence from prior programs, partner experience, or community knowledge.
Accessibility	Clearly describe how the program reduces barriers to participation locations that participants can reach easily and affordably; convenient, consistent, and predictable schedules; and equipment, language access, or other accommodations as needed.
Lasting Connection to the Outdoors	Program shows strong potential for participants to keep spending time outdoors after the program ends (e.g., repeat use of neighborhood spaces, gaining skills or gear that support independent outdoor activity, or developing a sense of ownership or care for a specific place through direct engagement with it).
Relationship with Community	Proposal demonstrates that people leading and delivering the programming have trusted relationships with the communities served through shared lived experience or a sustained history of working together.
Investment in Community	Investments made directly to community members are through paid or stipend roles (e.g., advisory roles, ambassadors, internships, or workforce training).
Alignment with Other Objectives	Additional consideration will be given to proposals that advance other Environment and Public Space objectives. Examples may include activating a public space or Circuit Trail that has received WPF investment or a site connected to a WPF-funded Community Greening plan.
Budget	Requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and stated results.

Budget

How much money is available?

There is no minimum or maximum amount of funding that projects may request. However, **total requests in the range of $75,000 to $300,000, including indirect costs, will likely be most competitive**. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the scope of the project and the project's contribution to the overall objective.

WPF has $3 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. At least half of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be prioritized for grants to organizations that have budgets under $1.5 million per year and/or are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion.

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. All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, professional development, and implementation are eligible for funding.

While eligible projects must focus on direct program delivery, modest advocacy, planning, communications and marketing, research, or capital expenses may be included to help strengthen or deliver the program. For example: gear, equipment storage, or temporary shade structures; community engagement that informs program delivery; or communications associated with program recruitment, are eligible expenses.

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

Submit your application by **5:00 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 must also provide an **estimated number of participants** for each program (to be supported by WPF) and the **estimated average hours of participation per person**. Please complete the program information attachment and upload it as an attachment in the submission portal.

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 Michele Perch at mperch@williampennfoundation.org**

Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Tuesday, December 1, 2026, at 11:00AM ET.**

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

Timeline

November 18, 2026

Proposal submission period opens.

December 1, 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.