William Penn Foundation

Request for Proposals

Increasing the Percentage of Diverse and Certified Teachers in Philadelphia Public Schools

Published November 18, 2026 **Due January 21, 2027**

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



Photo credit: Teach Plus

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 Children and Families program seeks to expand access to programs and resources that support the healthy development and academic success of young children, ages 0 to 8, in Philadelphia. A full description of the Children and Families 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, the percentage of certified K-12 teachers in Philadelphia will increase and the racial/ethnic makeup of the city's teaching workforce will be more reflective of its students.

Why is WPF prioritizing this objective?

Photo: Southwark Elementary School



Research shows that a well-prepared teacher is the single most important school-based element driving a student's academic success.[1] In addition, we also know that students of color benefit from having at least one same-race teacher during their schooling,[2] and all children benefit from diverse classroom and school settings.[3]

However, diverse and well-trained teachers are in short supply, particularly in Philadelphia. Nationally and locally, teachers of color are underrepresented compared to the population of students they serve. In Philadelphia schools, over 80% of students identify as people of color, while in the 2024-25 school year, only 38.5% of teachers do.[4] Additionally, in 2024-25, 22.9% of Philadelphia teachers did not have full certification.[5]

Increasing the percentage of certified, diverse teachers in public schools will increase the likelihood of student success in Philadelphia.

Students of color benefit from having at least one same-race teacher during their schooling, and all children benefit from diverse classroom and school settings.

What types of projects will get funded?

WPF seeks to support efforts that will increase the percentage of teachers in Philadelphia public schools (district and charter) who are fully certified, and/or that will build a teaching force with a racial/ethnic profile that more closely matches the profile of the student body in Philadelphia public schools. Funding will be prioritized for projects that focus on individuals working to obtain or who currently have a Level 1 elementary certification from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, but we understand that programs may also serve teachers of other grade levels.

Funding will be directed toward efforts that help pre-service and in-service teachers as well as community college students, career changers, or other individuals to achieve full certification and employment as teachers in Philadelphia public schools. Funding will also be directed to help retain currently certified teachers stay in their careers in Philadelphia public schools.

—

[1] Rice, J.K. (2003). *Teacher quality: Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes.*

[2] Blazar, D. (2021). *Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes*.

[3] Wells, A, Fox, L, Cordova-Cobo, D (2016). How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students

[4] Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition Teacher Workforce Data Repository

[5] Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition Teacher Workforce Data Repository

Projects can include:

- Recruiting adults pursuing post-secondary education to become teachers through traditional educator preparation or alternative preparation pathways;
- Improving educator preparation programs to increase teacher effectiveness and completion;
- Streamlining placement and hiring in Philadelphia public schools;
- Helping teachers convert from an emergency permit to a Level 1 certification or a Level 1 to Level 2;
- Addressing barriers to retention for quality teachers (e.g., related to workload, pay, connection to peer support/mentoring, or other possibilities)

Please note, under this RFP, the Foundation **will not** consider proposals to support the following:

- Independent research/data analysis projects
- Support for teachers working outside of Philadelphia public schools
- Individual tuition scholarships for certification and/or educator preparation programs
- Student loan repayment

Projects eligible for funding must serve aspiring or current teachers in Philadelphia public schools (i.e., within the School District of Philadelphia or charter schools authorized by the School District of Philadelphia).

What has to be in my proposal?

We are requesting proposals for **up to 36 months of funding**. The Foundation recognizes that there are many different tactics or approaches that could be used to advance the objective stated above. All proposals that meet the review criteria described below and advance the RFP's objective are encouraged.

Organizations that propose partnerships 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 partnerships that leverage complementary strengths, resources, and expertise.

All proposals that meet the criteria described on pages 6-7 are encouraged. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

Aspiring or Current Teachers in Philadelphia Public Schools

Projects eligible for funding must serve aspiring or current teachers in School District of Philadelphia (SDP) schools or charter schools authorized by SDP.



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 your project focus on individuals who currently teach in or who will teach in Philadelphia public schools?	☐	☐
2. Does your project advance greater alignment between the racial/ethnic diversity of teachers and students in Philadelphia public schools?	☐	☐
3. Will your project increase the percentage of fully certified teachers in Philadelphia public schools or support the retention of current fully certified teachers in Philadelphia public schools?	☐	☐

! 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.

WPF grantees with Teacher Pathways grants ending in 2028 or 2029 cannot request additional funds for their current project.

Grantees with grants ending in 2027 may apply for additional project funding. Demonstrated progress on previously funded projects to advance this objective (if applicable) will be a factor informing the evaluation of funding requests from existing grantees.

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
Project conveys no meaningful connection to the objective.	Project would make a marginal and/or uncertain contribution to advancing the objective.	Project would make a clear contribution to advancing the objective.	Project would make a clear and significant contribution to advancing the objective.
		Developing or Strong Required	

Program Design and Feasibility			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Proposal does not provide a clear approach to the work. Anticipated outcomes and success are not well-defined.	Proposal describes an approach to the work, but some aspects are vague, difficult to understand or seem unrealistic. Anticipated outcomes are defined, but are of uncertain achievability, based on the details provided.	Proposal provides a clear approach but could be more specific. Anticipated outcomes require further clarification to assess feasibility.	Proposal provides a clear and feasible plan to implement the work and includes a solid justification for anticipated outcomes.
		Developing or Strong Required	

Partnerships and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No potential partners or plans for collaboration.	Potential partners relevant to the project are identified but there are no clear commitments.	Some committed partnerships relevant to the project, a plan to build any necessary new partnerships, and a description of each partner's role.	Sufficient committed partnerships relevant to the project, a description of each partner's role, and a track record of successful collaboration.
		Developing or Strong Required	

Organizational Experience			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No implementation experience and no track record of success.	Less than three years of experience with advancing the specified objective and a limited track record of success.	Three to five years of experience advancing the specified objective and success in Philadelphia or other relevant cities or regions.	More than five years of experience advancing the specified objective and an extensive track record of success in Philadelphia and/or Pennsylvania.
	Emergent, Developing, or Strong Required		

Community Knowledge and Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No evidence of familiarity with the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project and no plan for future engagement.	Minimal evidence of familiarity with intended beneficiaries of the proposed project, but there is a commitment to develop a stakeholder engagement plan during implementation.	Evidence of familiarity with the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project and there is a plan for ongoing stakeholder engagement during implementation.	Key components of the project were informed by the intended beneficiaries of the proposed project and there is a plan for ongoing engagement during implementation.
		Developing or Strong Required	

What else will be expected in my proposal?

Coordination	Projects should be undertaken in coordination with other organizations and initiatives in the sector that seek to advance the same objective. If a project is being proposed in direct partnership with other organizations, a letter of support must be included from each partner organization.
Evidence-Based	Projects should utilize practices that evidence has shown will likely lead to the certification and/or retention of quality teachers.
Impact on Philadelphia public schools	Proposals should provide evidence that project participants are likely to become or remain teachers in Philadelphia public schools.
Diversity	Proposals should clearly outline activities for ensuring participant diversity and ensuring culturally responsive practices are implemented throughout the project.
Budget	The requested budget should be reasonable for the proposed activities, number of individuals to be served, and stated results.

Budget

How much money is available?

The maximum amount of funding that organizations may request for direct project expenses is $800,000 over three years. Requests of any size up to the maximum amount are welcome. Regardless of request amount, a clear justification for the requested budget must be provided in the budget narrative. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective. WPF has allocated $4.5 million to advance this objective through this RFP.

What should I include in my proposed budget?

Project budgets should cover up to 36 months 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 budget 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.

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 5 and meet all the review criteria on pages 6–7, 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 Stephanie Waller at swaller@williampennfoundation.org.**

Webinar

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