



Request for Inquiries

INFORMAL LEARNING INITIATIVE PHASE II

Background

In July 2017, William Penn Foundation (WPF) initiated the first cohort of the Informal Learning Initiative, which has been implementing a series of unique, engaging, and educational children's programming across Philadelphia. The cohort of eight partnerships (18 organizations in total) includes various organization types, thematic content areas, and target geographies. (For more information about that previously funded work, please see this [document](#).)

The partnerships advance literacy goals for children from age 3 through 8 through hands-on and interactive approaches, such as role-playing, exploring outdoors, gardening, experimenting, and artmaking, to develop language, vocabulary, writing, and comprehension skills. In the first year, the Initiative served over 700 children and their families.

An external implementation and outcome evaluation is being conducted by the Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC) at the University of Pittsburgh.

In year 1, LRDC analyzed programming documentation, conducted interviews with staff from each project, and observed programming. Preliminary findings from Year 1 of the Initiative include:

- Projects explored several different literacy objectives and/or approaches in programming.
- The most commonly used literacy technique revolved around incorporating books into programming.
- Hands-on activities were best when they came from the informal learning institutions' strengths in programmatic design and content.

- Having children and families show up for multiple sessions can help to build strong relationships among program providers and families, creating a sense of ownership in the informal learning institution.
- Rich adult-child conversations are an essential element: asking questions, constructing explanations, learning new vocabulary, observing and describing phenomena, and constructing narratives and personal connections are all indicators of deeper learning and conceptual change.

The first phase (2017 to 2019) of the Informal Learning Initiative demonstrated that (1) high-quality literacy-integrated programming is possible in informal settings and (2) collaboration among participating organizations increases programmatic innovation.

The second phase of the Initiative (2019 to 2022) will retain the best practices related to providing literacy-rich experiences in out-of-school settings and building a network of informal learning professionals.

Phase II will have a particular focus on supporting organizations to integrate early language and literacy development as part of their core organizational priorities and activities after the grant period. Participating organizations will be expected to include activities that build and demonstrate their ability to sustain high-quality, community-based, interactive, literacy building programming for young children.

Initiative Details

Overview

WPF requests Letters of Inquiry for three-year projects that institutionalize **community-based approaches** to engage children and families in literacy-building experiences through informal learning.

Eligibility

WPF seeks to fund 8 to 10 programs provided by partnerships between an informal learning institution and a community-based organization. Examples of such entities are provided below.

- **Community-based organizations:** social service organizations, neighborhood associations, religious institutions, community development organizations, recreation centers, and others that are firmly rooted in their communities and serve families with young children.
- **Informal learning institutions:** museums, science centers, makerspaces, arts organizations, libraries, historic houses, cultural centers, public gardens, arboreta, environmental centers, and others.

Objectives

The objectives of the second phase of the Initiative (July 2019-July 2022) are to:

- **Enhance** organizations' ability to integrate and institutionalize high-quality, evidence-based early language and literacy practices into ongoing programming and organizational policies, practices, and systems.
- **Implement** high-quality, age appropriate, informal literacy programming for children age 3-8 in low-income communities in Philadelphia.
- **Develop or strengthen** partnerships between informal learning institutions and community-based organizations.
- **Create physical equipment** that is active, engaging, content-rich and will facilitate children's development and literacy skill building. The specific design of this equipment will depend on the context into which it is being placed and the content area in which literacy skills are being built. Once complete, the equipment will live at the community-based organization in order to be a resource for the community when programming is not available.
- **Build a network** of informal learning professionals and educators to foster peer learning, collaboration, and resource sharing.
- **Evaluate** the impact of informal learning experiences on children, caregivers, and the organizations involved.
- **Share** evaluation findings with relevant stakeholders, including museum and community-based practitioners, sector leaders, and funders.

Project Criteria

While projects will be unique to each partnership, community, and target audience, there are common characteristics that proposed projects must address, including:

Organizational Development	The project includes clear strategies for participating organizations to sustainably embed early language and literacy learning opportunities into programming, organizational policies, and systems after the grant period.
Meaningful	The experience makes learning relevant to children’s existing knowledge, their lives, and the things they value.
Active	The experience includes opportunities for interactive exploration and engagement by including one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social play: child-adult, child-child interaction • Exploratory, object play: manipulation/symbolic representation of objects • Pretend/Socio-dramatic play: make-believe • Media play: use of technology/games
Content-rich	The experience is based on a language and literacy goal that is integrated into meaningful content (e.g. math, science, technology, art, history, nature, civics).
Fun	The experience is fun and enjoyable for children and caregivers, and heightens children’s interest and motivation for learning. The experience should offer something new or enhanced each time children attend.
Socially Interactive	The experience views caregivers as active participants and empowers them to understand and enact roles that support continued language and literacy learning.
Community-Based	The project is led in partnership between an informal learning institution and a community-based organization. The planning and development of the experience incorporates input from the audience who will be served. The program is based on the community’s specific assets, interests, and needs.
Accessible	Programming is held in welcoming and accessible locations during convenient times for children and families. Programming should not require enrollment in an early learning center or school.
Literacy Installation	The project team will create a permanent piece of physical equipment or installation of some sort that is active, engaging, content-rich and that will facilitate children’s development and literacy skill building.
Extension	The experience includes materials, activities, or digital resources for caregivers to extend learning beyond the structured activity. The project also allows families to visit the main location of the informal learning institution at no or low cost.
Audience	The experience serves children and families from a specific low-income community in Philadelphia. The project is designed for children age 3-8 (or a subset within that range).
Measurable	The project identifies relevant metrics that could potentially be used to measure implementation and impact. The project collects and contributes data on shared measures identified by the Initiative.

Evaluation

Funded projects will participate in an external, outcomes-based evaluation. The evaluation will assess whether the Initiative impacts:

- **Organizations' institutionalization** of high-quality, literacy-enriched programs for children and families;
- **Child** engagement, interest, and ability to engage in literacy experiences;
- **Caregiver** habits, attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to supporting literacy learning;
- **Quality of partnerships** between community-based organizations and cultural institutions; and
- Development and impact of a **network** of informal learning professionals.

Participation in the program evaluation will be expected through data submission, attendance and participation at network meetings and events, ongoing communication, and iterative improvement.

Teams

Community-based organizations and informal learning institutions of any size are encouraged to apply in partnership. Teams should designate a project lead who will serve as the primary project manager and liaison with WPF.

While experience collaborating with each other in the past is preferred, it is not required.

In recognition that all organizations bring valuable expertise to the partnership, no prospective partner should receive more than 70% of the requested funds.

The teams will be assessed on a number of factors, including:

- Commitment to modifying organizational practices to more effectively support early learning in low-income communities;
- Expertise in successfully delivering high-quality learning experiences to children;
- Strong content knowledge in early literacy practices;
- Proven ability to manage partnerships and reach underserved communities;
- Leadership and institutional resources to implement the project successfully;
- Legal status as a 501c(3) public charity.

Budget

Up to 60% of project expenses may be covered by a 3-year grant from WPF totaling a maximum of \$200,000. (Smaller budgets are also welcome.) At least 40% of expenses for the project should be covered by existing revenue sources. The most competitive inquiries will have the proportion of WPF support decreasing over the 3-year period.

Preliminary project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any fees to partner organizations or consultants (e.g. literacy expert, graphic designer). This information can be provided in the Inquiry Form narrative.

Total funding from WPF should not exceed 25% of participating organizations' total operating budgets during the grant period.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials, community engagement, staffing, and implementation, are eligible for funding. External evaluation costs should not be included, as this will be covered by WPF separately.

Timeline

January 8, 2019

Inquiry submission period opens

January 23, 2019

Optional informational webinar

February 8, 2019

Inquiry forms due by 5:00 PM EST

February 28, 2019

Select applicants invited to submit proposals

March 29, 2019

Proposals due by 5:00 PM EST

July 19, 2019

WPF Board decides on funding

August 2019 - August 2022

Program implementation

Process

The application process begins by submitting an [Inquiry Form](#) through the WPF online grant portal by **February 8, 2019 at 5:00 PM EST**. The [Portal Resource Guide](#) is a helpful resource on how to use the grant portal. A team will review all Inquiry Forms and invite select applicants to submit a full proposal.

In addition to the Inquiry Form, please attach (under “additional documentation”) a brief description of relevant experiences of proposed key staff.

The responses in the Inquiry should describe relevant information about partner organizations and not only about the applying organization.

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 Amanda Charles at acharles@williampennfoundation.org

Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an informational webinar on January 23 from 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

Please use this [link](#) to register for the webinar.

References

- ¹ Lesnick, J., Goerge, R., Smithgall, C., & Gwynne J. (2010). *Reading on Grade Level in Third Grade: How Is It Related to High School Performance and College Enrollment?* Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Retrieved from https://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Reading_on_Grade_Level_111710.pdf
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- ³ Swan, D. W., Grimes, J., Owens, T., Vese, R. D. Jr., Miller, K., Arroyo, J., & O’Shea, P. (2013). *Public libraries in the United States survey: Fiscal year 2013*. Institute of Museum and Library Services. Retrieved from <https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/plsfy2013.pdf>
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- ⁵ Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R., Berk, L., & Singer, D. (2009). *A mandate for playful learning in preschool: Presenting the evidence*. Oxford University Press.
- ⁶ Swan, D. (2013). *Kindergarteners’ Visitation to Libraries and Museums*. Institute of Museum and Library Services. Retrieved from <https://www.ims.gov/news-events/upnext-blog/2013/08/kindergarteners%E2%80%99-visitation-libraries-and-museums>
- ⁷ Sirinides, P., Fink, R., & DuBois, T. (2016). *A Study on Early Learning Services in Museums and Libraries*. Early Childhood Education Journal. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10643-016-0820-z>