

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Preserving Urban Gardens and Farms in Philadelphia

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Photo: Rob Cardillo for Neighborhood Gardens Trust

Introduction

The William Penn Foundation has a long history of investing in efforts to improve environmental conditions for residents of Greater Philadelphia. The Foundation's Environment and Public Space program was created to help improve and protect the natural and built environment in communities around the region. A full description of the program, its goal, and all of its objectives can be found on the Foundation's website. This specific Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations advance the following objective:

By 2035, increase the proportion of urban garden parcels safe from development or legal threats from 44% to 75%.

This objective was developed in conversation with Philadelphia growers and land access advocates, and with Philadelphia’s 2023 **Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root** as a guide. Through this process, we learned that preserving existing growing spaces was a key priority of the community, and the Foundation’s objective to increase the proportion of garden parcels safe from development or legal threats is in direct alignment with the Urban Agriculture Plan’s published recommendations.

The Foundation recognizes that increasing the proportion of urban gardens and farms that are safe from development or legal threats may well require a variety of strategies, including capacity building, planning, organizing, advocacy, and direct investment to secure parcels. With that understanding, there are few limitations on the project designs or approaches that we will consider in response to this RFP. We will consider proposals that focus on a single site, change on a citywide scale, or anything in between.

Regardless of the approach or the scope, all applicants should provide a compelling explanation for how their proposed work will advance the objective above. The criteria used to assess all proposals can be found on pages 6-7 of this document.

Why is the Foundation using a Request for Proposals to advance this objective?

The Foundation has chosen to advance this objective using a Request for Proposals for several reasons. First, we believe that stakeholders across the region have a great deal of expertise and experience that can be supported to make progress on an objective that we heard was important to communities in our region. We want to hear about the impactful projects that are underway or could get underway and need funding. Second, we want to be as transparent as possible about the opportunity for non-profit organizations in the region to secure funding for work to advance this objective. Third, we heard from applicants and grantees in the past that our grant application process was overly burdensome, had unpredictable timelines, and did not provide sufficient information about the funding availability or the criteria used in selecting grantees. Fourth, we heard that applicants wanted an opportunity to show Foundation staff their work, not just tell them about it. The RFP process, including site visits as described below, is part of our effort to address all of this important feedback and to align with the Foundation’s grantmaking values (as detailed on our website).

This RFP seeks project proposals that will advance the objective to increase the proportion of urban garden parcels safe from development or legal threats.

Background

Philadelphia’s urban gardens and farms are nationally recognized models for growing food hyper-locally, promoting local land ownership, and strengthening communities.

The benefits of gardens for city residents are well documented – they add green space to neighborhoods, positively impact physical and mental well-being, serve as places where community members connect with one another, and, of course, are a source of local healthy food options. In most cases, these spaces serve communities that need them the most. About 70% of Philadelphia’s active urban gardens and farms are in communities where more than 20% of the population lives below the poverty level; approximately 67% of the gardens are also in areas where the population of people of color is greater than 50%.¹

Despite these many benefits, these spaces are under threat. They are vulnerable to gentrification pressures, and they confront a variety of other factors that prevent growers from owning or leasing the land that they steward.

Community green spaces under threat

Since 2008, at least 140 gardens and farms in Philadelphia have been lost, and fewer than half of those that remain are owned by their gardeners or by a trusted organization or entity that will protect the garden over time.²

¹ [“Philadelphia’s Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root”](#), p. 20

² [“Philadelphia’s Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the Root”](#), pp. 23, 49



Opportunity Overview

The Foundation aims to support efforts that will contribute to increasing the preservation of Philadelphia’s urban garden and farm parcels. We expect to fund work focusing on interventions and on parcels that communities have identified as high priorities.

We invite proposals for support of a range of activities that can result in more secure garden and farm parcels, including planning, technical assistance, stewardship, organizing, advocacy, and direct acquisition. The Foundation recognizes that levels of activity and stewardship vary across spaces in Philadelphia that are currently being used as gardens and farms. These spaces also have varied histories and connections to the surrounding community and its current residents. The most competitive proposals will be those that seek to support the preservation of well-established gardens and farms that can demonstrate community involvement and ongoing activity.

As noted, we also recognize that there are a variety of different approaches to preserving Philadelphia’s urban gardens and farms and we therefore welcome a variety of responses to this RFP. This includes, but is not limited to, proposals that focus on:

- direct acquisition of existing, established and actively managed urban gardens and farms
- strategies to reduce the number of community gardens and farms on private land sold at sheriff sales
- strategies to strengthen the infrastructure and capacity for tracking and monitoring the status of Philadelphia’s urban garden parcels
- strategies to improve how the public is educated and informed about land access and the sale, transfer, and lease of gardens and farms
- organizing and convenings with clear goals that directly support preservation of urban farms and gardens
- legal and technical support that can help advance this objective.

We will also consider work focused on improving long-term stewardship through strengthened organizational and operational capacity. We will not fund proposals to start up new gardens, but rather will be focusing on existing ones.

We are requesting proposals for projects of **one to two years** that will result in securing and preserving of garden and farm parcels in Philadelphia. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations. WPF has **\$3 million available** to advance this objective currently. There is no minimum or maximum that organizations may request, but we aim to attract and fund a range of projects. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the project's contribution to the overall objective.

Eligibility

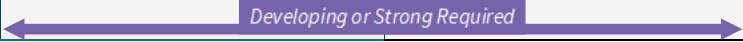
Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a fiscal sponsor – a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible to apply.

Proposed projects must occur in Philadelphia.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be judged on the criteria below. **Applicants should address these criteria in their narrative responses to the application questions.**

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.
Beneficiaries			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not identify expected beneficiaries of the project.	Identified beneficiaries of the project do not include prioritized communities.	Project beneficiaries are identified, include prioritized communities, and will significantly benefit from the proposed work.	Project beneficiaries are identified, include prioritized communities, and will receive significant and major benefits from the proposed work.
Meaningful Community Engagement			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No meaningful engagement of community in preparation of proposal or implementation of proposed work.	Limited engagement of community in preparation of proposal or implementation of proposed work.	Meaningful engagement of community in development of proposal or implementation of project.	Robust and sustained engagement of community in preparation of proposal and implementation of proposed work.
Partnership and Collaboration			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Does not address partnerships that will be necessary for success.	Identified relevant partners but does not describe the role that partners will play in the proposed work.	Identifies relevant partners and fully describes collaboration with those partners.	Identifies relevant partners, fully describes the role that partners will play in the proposed work, and provides evidence of partners' commitment to fulfilling the roles described such as through an included letter of support.
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.

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 that describes the organizational capacity to carry out the proposed project, a feasible plan to implement the work, and a plan to track project outcomes and the impact on the RFP objective.
			

Additional expectations and considerations:

Maintenance	Proposals will be expected to include strategies to address maintenance needs associated with the proposed work.
Funding for Capital Improvements	Applicants requesting funding for capital improvements should identify how sustainability and/or climate resiliency has been considered and/or incorporated into their project design.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to other WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.
Gentrification	Proposals that include strategies to minimize and mitigate gentrification risks will be more competitive.

Learning and Evaluation

Grantees will be expected to complete a brief written report each year describing how they have made progress toward the objective above and what they have learned during the year.

In addition, 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.



Webinar

Interested organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Tuesday, September 24, 2024 at 3:00 PM EST.**

Register for the webinar at <https://lu.ma/williampenfoundation>.

Budget

Project budgets can cover up to two years of funding.

Project budgets should be all-inclusive, including any fees to partner organizations or 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. If you are using a fiscal sponsor, the 25% will be calculated based on the organization that is performing the proposed work.

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

In rare cases, it is possible that *everything* an organization does is focused on advancing the specific objective stated above. If that is the case, an organization may be eligible for general operating, rather than project support. If you believe that to be the case, please contact the Program Officer named below to discuss further.

Application Process

Before you apply, please review your responses to the three 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.

Is your project:

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Helping to secure existing and active urban gardens or farms from legal or development threats? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Focused entirely on urban gardens or farms in Philadelphia? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prioritizing interventions and parcels that communities have identified as high priorities? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please also review all of the criteria on pages 6 and 7 and make sure that your project aligns with those.

If you answered “yes” to the questions above and meet the stated criteria and expectations, 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 EST on October 25, 2024**. A WPF team member 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 applicants 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 WPF staff 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 for consideration of their proposals.

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 Jazmine da Costa at jdacosta@williampennfoundation.org.

Timeline

September 18, 2024

Proposal submission period opens

September 24, 2024

Informational Webinar (see previous page)

October 25, 2024

Proposals due by 5:00PM EST

November 6-8, 2024

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.

November 11-27, 2024

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants

January 31, 2025

WPF Board reviews selected proposals

February 2025

Project implementation can begin