

**WilliamPennFoundation**

Request for Proposals

# Increasing Urban Trees in Philadelphia

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*Photo: R. Kennedy for GPTMC*

# Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) 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 its objectives can be found on the Foundation’s website. This Request for Proposals (RFP) was created to help organizations to advance the following objective, which was developed in consultation with many stakeholders around the region:

**By 2035, increase the number of trees by at least 35,000 across the seven Philly Tree Plan priority areas.**

The Foundation recognizes that there are many ways that organizations and communities can contribute to advancing this objective. With that understanding, this RFP imposes few limitations on the approach that applicants may take. For example, proposals may focus on direct service, policy or system change, outreach and education, or other ways to advance the objective. Proposals may have a small geographic focus or may seek to make change on a citywide scale (as long as the proposed project demonstrates impact in the priority areas).

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should provide a compelling explanation for how their proposed work will advance the objective above. The specific criteria that will be 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 help to equitably and sustainably increase the number of trees providing benefits to neighborhoods across Philadelphia.**

# Background

Healthy trees make a significant contribution to the quality of life of Philadelphia residents. Trees provide protection from heat, reduce air pollution, improve physical and mental health, and are an important asset for mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts.<sup>1</sup> Given these benefits, it is especially unfortunate that trees are not equitably distributed across the city, and that the urban forest is threatened by development, inadequate maintenance, and the effects of climate change.<sup>2</sup>

A comprehensive assessment of Philadelphia’s tree canopy conducted in 2018 found that 6% of the city’s tree canopy (the part of the land that is covered by tree leaves and branches from a bird’s-eye view) was lost over the last decade. The assessment also illustrated the inequitable distribution of trees. Tree canopy covers 20% of all land across the city, but this ranges from less than 5% in some areas to more than 45% in others. Areas with fewer trees and less tree canopy tend to be lower-income and Black and Brown-majority neighborhoods that are also beset by other inequities. The quality-of-life implications can be profound, as these areas often experience higher temperatures – sometimes up to a 22-degree disparity – and have lower physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

In response to these findings, the City launched a process to develop its first-ever strategic plan to make tree coverage more robust, equitable, and sustainable. Released in 2023 and informed by input from over 9,000 residents, the **Philly Tree Plan** established a 10-year strategy for the equitable growth and care of Philadelphia’s urban forest. Based on key environmental and socioeconomic factors, the Philly Tree Plan identified seven areas where an increase in tree canopy can provide the most benefit and recommends prioritizing these areas for investments in tree planting, care, and programming.

## 2.6 million tons of carbon dioxide

Philadelphia’s urban forest stores an estimated 2.6 million tons of carbon dioxide and removes and stores an additional 99,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Philly Tree Plan: Growing Our Urban Forest](#), February 2023, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> [Philly Tree Plan: Growing Our Urban Forest](#), February 2023, p. 2-7

<sup>3</sup> [Tree Canopy Assessment: Philadelphia, PA](#), December 2019

<sup>4</sup> [USDA: The urban forests of Philadelphia](#), 2016

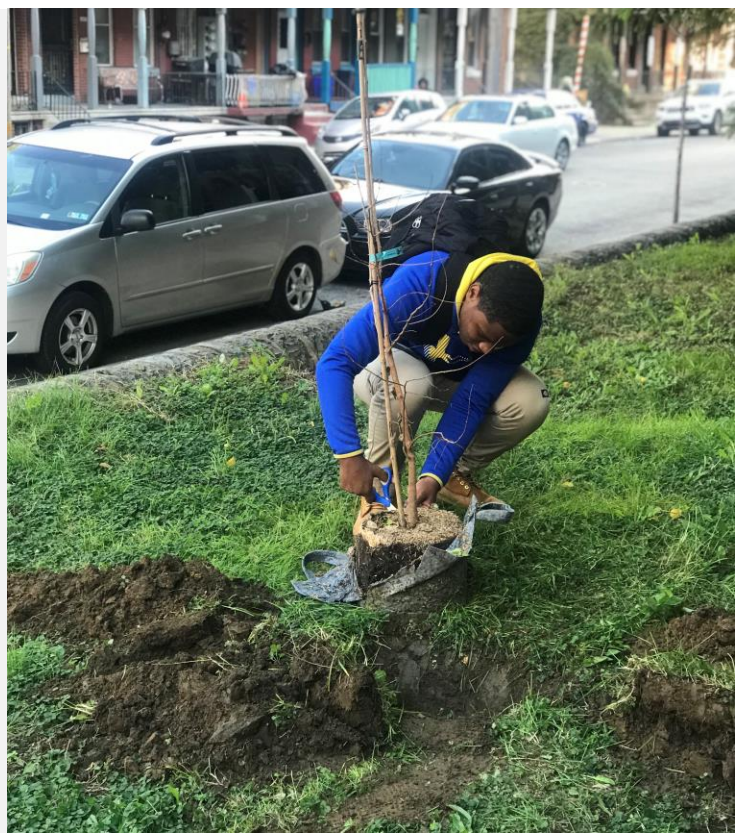


Photo: Tree Philly

# Opportunity Overview

The Foundation would like to support efforts that will help to grow and sustain Philadelphia's urban trees by planting new trees and by creating the conditions under which new and existing trees can thrive.

We are requesting proposals for **one- to three-year projects**. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of organizations.

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.

As noted, 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 criteria described below are encouraged.

WPF has **\$5 million** available to advance this objective through this RFP. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the project's contribution to the overall objective.

## Eligibility

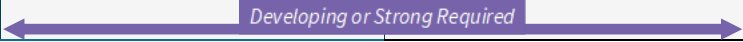
Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible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

<b>Tree Equity</b>	Proposals that will result in the most significant impact on health, well-being, and quality of life in low-income neighborhoods and in neighborhoods of color will be the most competitive.
<b>Maintenance and Establishment Care</b>	Proposals for tree planting projects are expected to include strategies for establishment care and for routine maintenance beyond the establishment period.
<b>Gentrification</b>	Proposals that include strategies to minimize and mitigate gentrification risks will be more competitive.
<b>Budget</b>	The requested budget must be reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results. For tree planting projects, costs per tree must be appropriate for the location and conditions of the proposed tree plantings. Proposals should demonstrate that these factors have been considered.
<b>Advance Other Objectives</b>	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to other WPF objectives will be given additional consideration.

# 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 11:00 AM EST.**

Register for the webinar at <https://lu.ma/william penn foundation>.



# Budget

Project budgets should cover **up to three 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 an applicant's operating budget.

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

# Application Process

**Before you apply**, please review the primary question below. If you can confidently answer “yes,” this funding opportunity may be relevant to you. If you respond “no,” this opportunity is not a good match for your project, and you should not apply.

## Is your project:

Focused specifically on helping to equitably and sustainably increase the number of trees in Philadelphia?

YES NO

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

If you answered “yes” to the question above and meet the stated criteria and expectations, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpcf.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 Michele Perch at [mperch@williampennfoundation.org](mailto:mperch@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