

**WilliamPennFoundation**

Request for Proposals

# Arts and Culture Programming

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## Introduction

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) has a long history of investing in efforts to create a vibrant, dynamic, and accessible arts and culture sector that positively impacts the residents of the Philadelphia region. The Foundation’s Arts and Culture program was created to expand access to diverse, inclusive, and high-quality arts and culture experiences. A full description of the Arts and Culture program, its goals, 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:

**Provide access to arts and culture experiences that are intentionally designed to engage a community or audience.**

The Foundation recognizes 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. All projects must make arts and culture experiences accessible to new audiences, be driven by skilled artists and culture bearers, and be informed by the needs and interests of the intended beneficiaries. Proposals may focus on one artistic discipline or be multidisciplinary and may have a small geographic focus or seek to provide programming on a citywide scale.

Regardless of the approach, all applicants should describe 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 8-9 of this document.

**Please note: Two Arts and Culture Programming RFPs are scheduled over the next 12 months. This RFP is for activities beginning in or after August 2025 and focuses on projects that will:**

- **Make arts and culture experiences accessible to communities your organization has not previously engaged;**
- **And/or will increase your organization's audience diversity more broadly.**

### **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 this important feedback and to align with the Foundation's grantmaking values (as detailed on our website).

**This RFP seeks project proposals that advance this objective and support meaningful arts and culture experiences that engage new and diverse communities across the region.**

# Background

Engaging with the arts—whether creating or consuming art or practicing cultural traditions—builds a sense of connection among participants or within community; reinforces cultural identities; and improves community livability and resilience.<sup>1</sup> However, we acknowledge that these experiences and benefits are unevenly distributed to individuals and in communities, especially those that have been historically under-resourced (i.e. communities of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, and members of disability communities). To address this inequity, we are particularly interested in supporting programming that is designed, developed, and presented in ways that are relevant and welcoming to these communities, resulting in greater access to arts and culture experiences in Philadelphia and the region.

## Access Inequities

Not everyone has equal access to the arts. Despite the myriad benefits that the arts bring to individuals and communities, just 51% believe that “everyone in my community has equal access to the arts.”<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [Rugg, G. & Novak-Leonard, J. \(2021\). The Outcomes of Arts Engagement for Individuals and Communities. NORC at the University of Chicago](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Bennett, J. & Delvalle, S. \(2024\). Americans Speak Out About the Arts: An In-Depth Look at Public Perceptions and Attitudes About Arts and Culture in America in 2023. Americans for the Arts.](#)

# Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that connect more Philadelphians to high-quality arts and culture experiences that reflect the cultural diversity of the region and contribute to its vibrancy. We will prioritize support for performances, exhibitions, and other arts and culture projects designed to address historic inequities of access to arts and culture experiences.

We are requesting proposals for 1-2-year projects that will increase opportunities for people across the region to engage with a range of high-quality arts and culture experiences. This funding opportunity is for activities beginning in or after August 2025. Proposed projects must focus on inclusive and equitable opportunities that seek to extend programming beyond an organization's traditional or core audience. Proposed projects should make arts and culture experiences accessible to communities that have not been previously engaged and/or increase audience diversity more broadly. Applicants should explain how their understanding of the needs, interests, and perspectives of a newly engaged community has been developed and how it has informed the proposed work. After reviewing proposals, WPF will conduct site visits and gather additional information from a limited number of applicants.

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. Proposals that include a "series" or multiple activities must be unified by a clear curatorial premise.

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 a total of \$3.5 million available to advance this objective through this RFP. WPF values diverse approaches from various organizations and communities to address the objective. We aim to attract and fund a range of projects. There is no minimum amount of funding that projects may request but the most competitive proposals will likely be those with total grant requests under \$300,000 (over 2 years). The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective.

At least \$1 million of the total amount awarded under this RFP will be reserved for grants to organizations that have budgets under \$1 million per year and/or are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination or exclusion.

## Eligibility

Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Eligible applicants include:

- **Artist collectives:** a group of artists who come together to collaborate, share resources, and work towards common creative and/or social goals.
- **Arts and culture organizations:** organizations with a mission that centers on the creation, performance, and/or presentation of artistic and cultural programs and experiences.
- **Community-based organizations:** local, nonprofit groups that work to improve conditions for and directly serve the needs of their communities.
- **Public institutions:** government entities and agencies.

WPF funds the following disciplines: dance, design, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, media arts, music, musical theater, opera, multidisciplinary arts, theater, and visual arts. Organizations that are not primarily arts and culture organizations must have a history of high-quality artistic programming and the appropriate artistic staff.

Proposed projects cannot be for the primary benefit of artists. Competitive projects must include engagement with or participation of non-artist community members.

The majority of our funding will be awarded to projects in the City of Philadelphia. However, projects in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties, and the City of Camden, NJ will also be considered.

### **Please note:**

*Projects focused on arts learning and exposure for youth should refer to the Arts Education objectives for potential eligibility and future funding opportunities.*

*The Foundation **will not** fund a program/project that is currently supported through a William Penn Foundation grant.*

## Definition of Terms

<p><b>Community</b></p>	<p>A group of people having a particular characteristic in common. This can be based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geography, interest area, or another characteristic but should be defined by the applicant.</p>
<p><b>Community-centered programming</b></p>	<p>Programming is specifically designed to meet the unique needs, interests, and goals of a particular community. This type of programming prioritizes engagement, collaboration, and input from community members, ensuring that the programs are culturally relevant, inclusive, and responsive.</p>
<p><b>Culturally relevant</b></p>	<p>Considers the interests, experiences, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries. This typically begins with engaging stakeholders as co-creators to learn more about their backgrounds, cultures, and interests. (Also referred to as culturally responsive).</p>
<p><b>High-quality</b></p>	<p>Applies artistic excellence and knowledge to create experiences that are informed by the needs, desires, and perspectives of the intended beneficiaries to generate benefits such as experiencing joy, building connection, and reinforcing cultural identities. It is well-executed, well-produced.</p>
<p><b>Intended beneficiaries</b></p>	<p>A group or community that a project, initiative, or organization aims to engage and positively impact. Identifying the intended beneficiaries helps ensure that the goals and strategies of the program are tailored to address the needs of those it aims to serve.</p>

# Review Criteria

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

Artistic or Cultural Practice			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Project lacks involvement of an artist/artistic team.	Project includes an artist/artistic team but not in a central role and not with experience or expertise to implement project.	Project created by an artist/artistic team, with limited and/or developing experience serving as the basis for the project.	Artist/artistic team is central to conception and design of project and has demonstrated skills and success to realize project to its full vision/design.
			← Strong Required →
Knowledge of Project's Intended Participants			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
No apparent familiarity with the intended participants, history of working with them, or plan for learning about them.	Limited understanding of intended participants the project seeks to engage.	Deliberate and growing efforts to learn about and build relationships with intended participants.	Deep knowledge of and relationships with intended participants, strong rationale for project relevance, and welcoming approach.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	
Orientation to Racial Equity and Economic Inclusion			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Project has vague or non-existent goals for engaging or building relationships with communities of color, economically vulnerable communities, or other historically marginalized groups.	Project has limited goals focused on inclusion and access but has potential to develop further.	Project has clearly articulated approach to make artistic and cultural work inclusive and accessible.	Project designed with a goal to address structural inequities of access and opportunity.
		← Developing or Strong Required →	
Community-Centered Practice			
Absent	Emergent	Developing	Strong
Project team has minimal experience with inclusive and community-informed practices.	Project is attempting new inclusive and community-informed practices.	Project is building on inclusive and community-informed practices that project team has experience implementing.	Project team has a long-standing history of inclusive and community-informed practices.
← Emergent, Developing, or Strong Required →			



**Additional expectations:**

<b>Intended Beneficiaries</b>	Proposal identifies and describes a well-defined group or community that the project aims to engage and positively impact.
<b>Articulated Benefits</b>	Proposal articulates the positive impact(s) it seeks to have on its intended beneficiaries.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Proposed work considers accessibility and accommodation, including the disabilities community, aging populations, low-income individuals and families, and non-English speakers.
<b>Budget</b>	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results and allocates adequate resources for the artists involved in the project.

# Learning and Insights

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 projects are invited to participate in an informational webinar on **Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at 11 AM EST.**

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

# Budget

Project budgets should cover up to two years of funding. While not required, organizations are encouraged to build on their existing programs, using WPF funding to supplement or enhance those efforts.

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 total operating budget.

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

# Application Process

**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
Does your project create a publicly accessible and culturally relevant arts and culture experience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the project’s conception, design, and implementation include an artist or artistic team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will your project make art accessible to communities you have not previously engaged and/or increase audience diversity more broadly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your project informed by the needs, interests, and perspectives of its intended beneficiaries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your project take place in the cities of Philadelphia or Camden, or Bucks, Chester, Delaware, or Montgomery counties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please also review all the criteria on pages 8 and 9 and make sure that your program aligns with those.

If you answered “yes” to all of the questions above and meet the stated criteria, the application process begins by completing a proposal on our online submission system at <https://wpf.my.site.com/grantee>. Submit your application by 5:00PM ET on **April 25, 2025**. 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 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 Program Officer Meghan Beals [mbeals@williampennfoundation.org](mailto:mbeals@williampennfoundation.org).*

# Timeline

## March 19, 2025

Proposal submission period opens.

## March 25, 2025

Informational Webinar (see page 9)

## April 25, 2025

Proposals due by 5:00PM ET

## May 7-12, 2025

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.

## May 12-

## June 6, 2025

Site visits conducted by WPF staff with selected applicants.

## July 25, 2025

WPF Board review selected proposals.

## August 2025

Project implementation can begin.