

WilliamPennFoundation

Request for Proposals

Reducing Sewage Overflows in Greater Philadelphia

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Photo: Chris Baker Evens

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 Environment and Public Space 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, reduce annual untreated sewage overflows by 5 billion gallons per year across the region.

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. Projects must primarily serve residents of the cities of Philadelphia and/or Camden and 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.

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 7-8 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 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 reduce the volume of untreated sewage overflows that degrade natural and community assets and negatively impact quality of life.

Background

Many communities in Philadelphia experience a range of public health and socio-economic challenges linked to poor sanitation, pollution, and harmful environmental conditions.

Every year billions of gallons of stormwater mixed with raw sewage end up, untreated, in local creeks, streams and rivers due to antiquated infrastructure and inadequate sanitary controls. Areas most significantly impacted by sewage contamination are often located within or adjacent to neighborhoods already burdened by low incomes and other environmental hazards.

For cities like Philadelphia and Camden, rivers and streams constitute our largest remaining undeveloped open spaces. We want to ensure and promote equitable access to these important natural and community assets for fishing, boating, swimming, and more. With increased efforts to reduce sewage pollution alongside continued improvements in monitoring, safety, and education, we are closer than we've ever been to recapturing and reactivating the full potential of these urban waterways for recreational access and community benefit.

15 billion gallons annually

Each year from 2010 to 2022, Philadelphia dumped on average 15 billion gallons of raw sewage mixed with untreated runoff into local waterways.¹

128 days of unsafe water quality

Even as residents flock back to the region's waterways in the wake of major improvements from the 1972 U.S. Clean Water Act, regular sewage contamination translates into approximately 128 days each year when residents cannot play in many local waterways without putting their health at risk.¹



Pictured: Locals swim in the Chicago River, made possible by regulations and cleanup efforts. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

¹ [Report: Sewage Pollution in Philadelphia. July 20, 2023 \(environmentamerica.org\)](https://www.environmentamerica.org/report/sewage-pollution-in-philadelphia-july-20-2023)

Opportunity Overview

The Foundation seeks to support efforts that will reduce overflows of sewage into local waterways. Advancing this objective will expand safe and equal access to the recreational benefits of community waterways. You can help to advance this objective through infrastructure upgrades, policy reforms, regulatory advocacy, education, training, and programming.

Please note: Projects to implement or advance Green Stormwater Infrastructure are not eligible for funding under this objective. A Request for Proposals focused on Green Stormwater Infrastructure will be released on June 18, 2025.

We are requesting proposals for **up to three years of funding**. 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.

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. WPF values diverse approaches from various organizations and communities to address the objective, and we aim to attract and expect to fund a range of projects. There is no minimum amount of funding that projects may request. We are unlikely to accommodate individual requests over \$3 million. The grant amount requested should be commensurate with the contribution that the project will make to the overall objective. We are especially eager to receive applications from small organizations and/or from organizations that are led by individuals who are members of groups with a history of discrimination. Projects that demonstrate a diversity of funding sources are likely to be more competitive.

For applicants requesting funding for capital improvements: WPF works with [Green Building United](#) to provide optional, free, hands-on technical assistance (TA) to grantees to ensure that sustainability and climate resilience are factored into capital projects funded by WPF. Free TA is available to grantees in the planning, design, or early construction phases of their projects. TA can help organizations reduce operational costs, including energy costs; prepare for extreme weather; access financial incentives; and meet other sustainability goals. To date, support has included one-on-one discussions, design reviews with relevant professionals, and facilitated site visits to peer organizations who have addressed similar sustainability/resilience challenges. Organizations that are selected to advance beyond the written proposal stage of the review process will have the opportunity to learn more about free TA from Green Building United during their site visit with WPF staff.

Eligibility

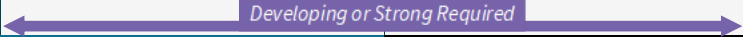
Applicants must be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)3 public charities or operate under a public charity fiduciary. Public charities include community-based organizations, schools and educational institutions, and other types of public-serving groups. Government entities are also eligible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

Proposed project impact must occur in **Philadelphia or Camden**.

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:

Inclusion of New Constituencies	Partnerships that introduce new voices and constituencies to this work will likely be more competitive.
Advance Other Objectives	Projects that strongly advance this objective and also contribute to other WPF objectives will likely be more competitive.
Sewage Reduction Estimate	Where possible, projects should include a scientific or engineering-based estimate of their contribution to reduced volume of untreated sewage overflow.
Budget	The requested budget is reasonable for the proposed activities and the stated results.

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 organizations are invited to participate in an optional informational webinar on **Tuesday, March 25, 2025 at 3:00 PM ET.**

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

Budget

Project budgets should cover up to three years of funding and may include up to three months for planning. 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 organization's operating budget.

All aspects of project development and execution, including planning, design, materials and equipment, 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
Is the applying organization a 501(c)3 public charity OR operating under a public charity fiduciary OR a government entity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the project focused on reducing untreated sewage overflows in Philadelphia or Camden?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please also review all of the criteria on pages 7 and 8 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://wpcf.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 Nathan Boon at nboon@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.