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I. GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

obtain an electronic version of this application, visit www.chescocf.org

be shared electronically with Grant Panel Members & Fund Advisors + posted online.

Date: 1/6/2026

Contact Information

Organization Name: Willistown Conservation Trust
Address: 925 Providence Road Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: (610) 353-2562
Website: www.wctrust.org
Year Incorporated: 1996
FEIN: 23-2841453

ED/CEO Name: Kate Etherington
ED/CEO E-mail: kwe@wctrust.org
Board Chair Name: John Stoviak
Board Chair Approval (check here):
Primary Contact Name: Gretchen Groebel
Primary Contact E-mail: gtg@wctrust.org

Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Arts, Culture, Heritage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Education, Library	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Environment, Animals Social Justice, Civic Engagement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	Human Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	If other, please describe:		

Mission: Willistown Conservation Trust’s mission is to preserve and manage the open land, rural character, scenic, recreational, historic, agricultural and natural resources of the Willistown area and nearby communities, and to share these unique resources with people of all ages and backgrounds to inspire, educate and develop a lifelong commitment to the land and the natural world.

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served): The work of the Willistown Conservation Trust is concentrated on 28,000 acres of Willistown Township and surrounding area encompassing the Crum, Ridley and Darby Creek watersheds in Southeastern Pennsylvania. This geographic area is just 20 miles from the city of Philadelphia and encompasses Chester County and parts of Delaware County.

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served. (Include Chester County # &/or % served.) WCT works with state, county and local governments and citizens to preserve open space throughout the region. We serve a diverse population of visitors and residents in Southeastern Pennsylvania, mainly residing in Chester and Delaware Counties. Our population served is a combination of adults, families with children of all ages, multi-generational, and from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities. Annual Number of people served is approximately 4,500.

Annual Budget \$ 2,999,414 _____ # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff 20
78 % of budget for program expenses _____ # of Board Volunteers 19
12 % of budget for administrative expenses _____ # of Active Non-Board Volunteers 434
10 % of budget for fundraising expenses _____ # of Volunteer Hours 1795

100% = total

Top 3-5 funding sources:

- Private Donors

- **Governmental Grants**
- **Investment Income**

This grant proposal is for: ___X___ Direct Service Programs & General Operating &/or ___ Capacity Building

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Contingency Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Partnerships, Collaborations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Merger, Closure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission, Vision, Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Board Engagement & Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marketing, Communication
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resource Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	Operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Technology
<input type="checkbox"/>	If other, please describe:				

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$ 2,500 - 10,000.00 _____

Proposal Summary: *(a few sentences, please)*

For 30 years, Willistown Conservation Trust (WCT) has protected and stewarded the land, water, and wildlife of the Willistown region, conserving over 7,500 acres through land protection, habitat restoration, sustainable agriculture, bird conservation, watershed protection, and community education. General operating support will allow WCT to respond to accelerating development and climate pressures by advancing land conservation, ecological research, regenerative farming at Rushton Farm, clean water initiatives, and education programs for all that ensure these vital landscapes remain healthy and resilient for generations to come.

II. GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Provide clear, concise information in 1-3 pages. Please be brief.

1. Nonprofit’s history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness

Land conservation efforts have been underway in the Willistown area for over 40 years. The initial organization, formed in 1979, was known as the Willistown Area Conservation Program and was a satellite program of the Brandywine Conservancy. With the encouragement of the community and local conservation leaders, the **Willistown Conservation Trust (WCT)** became a community-based land trust in 1996 with a committed and active Board of Trustees.

WCT has five core program areas: Land Protection, Stewardship/Habitat Restoration; Sustainable Agriculture; Bird Conservation; and Watershed Protection. Protecting open space in the Willistown area is WCT’s highest priority. We are working to add another 4,000 acres of land to the already protected 7,500 acres in WCT’s focal area.

We view our protected lands as a large reservoir of natural resources and work with area landowners to manage this land to promote healthy ecosystems. Our Land Stewardship efforts focus on habitat restoration in our ever-growing group of beautiful nature preserves as well as property under conservation easements. Currently, nearly 400 acres of land is owned by WCT, most recently increased by 90 acres of the former Kirkwood Farm purchased in 2024 to become the Preserve at Kestrel Hill.

WCT’s Rushton Farm, located within the 86-acre Rushton Woods Preserve, is a community supported agricultural (CSA) program that promotes regenerative agriculture and produces healthy food for the community, while enhancing the area with biodiversity and habitat. Rushton Farm hosts a 130-family CSA program that donates thousands of pounds of produce to local food cupboards.

The rich and diverse landscapes on our protected open space provide ideal habitat for migratory birds. WCT's Bird Conservation Program is dedicated to advancing avian research and educating the community about birds, whose populations are in rapid decline. Over 20,000 birds since 2010 have been banded at our federally licensed banding station located at Rushton Woods Preserve.

With over 190 stream miles in our focal area, the goal of WCT's Watershed Protection Program is to ensure the long-term health of our streams, through monitoring, restoration, and best management practices. Our watershed team collaborates with the scientific and academic community, including partners at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University and Stroud Water Research Center.

In addition to our five core program areas, we view education and public outreach as essential to advance conservation. Education initiatives include science and discovery experiences for K-12 children, and a breadth of field study research projects conducted by higher education scholars and interns. In 2019 we completed the Rushton Conservation Center to focus and magnify regional and national conservation issues by hosting conferences; workshops; films; lectures and events.

WCT is currently led by Kate Etherington who became Executive Director and President upon the retirement of founder Jeanne (Bonnie) Van Alen in 2021. WCT is driven by a professional staff of twenty individuals, each with a high degree of expertise in their respective fields. Empowered by 7,500 acres of conserved land, together with our diverse research, education and outreach partners, and supporters, we are making impacts far beyond the Willistown community to include the important work of modeling solutions to critical environmental challenges facing our changing world.

2. Funding request

Description of Key Initiatives

At Willistown Conservation Trust, our mission is to save, study, and share the land, water, and habitat in our region. Our work is centered around six core initiatives:

- 1. Land Protection:** We have protected over 7,500 acres of land, ensuring that these open spaces remain undeveloped and continue to provide essential wildlife habitat, water resources, and scenic beauty. This initiative includes the stewardship of our existing conservation easements, the acquisition of additional land, and the promotion of best practices in land management.
- 2. Land Stewardship:** WCT is committed to balancing access to the land with long-term management goals. This means monitoring and protecting fragile or endangered species, combating threats posed by invasive weeds and species overpopulation, and managing with care our area's magnificent landscapes to ensure they are protected in perpetuity.
- 3. Bird Conservation:** Birds are in trouble in our rapidly changing world. One recent report suggests that North America's bird populations have declined by more than 3 billion birds — more than a third — in the past 50 years. The Trust's Bird Conservation Program works to enhance and promote bird conservation in the Willistown area and everywhere. Our focus is to advance avian research, and through education, to foster a love of birds.
- 4. Watershed Protection:** With over 190 stream miles in Willistown Conservation Trust's focus area, including the headwaters of Ridley, Crum and Darby Creeks, the goal of the Trust's Watershed Protection Program is to ensure long-term health of these streams through monitoring, restoration, and best management practices. 5.

Rushton Farm: As part of our Rushton Woods Preserve, Rushton Farm serves as a model for sustainable agriculture and a hub for community education. It produces organic vegetables for local food banks, engages volunteers, and hosts educational programs that connect people with nature and the sources of their food. Rushton Farm also supports our bird conservation work, acting as a key site for the study of migratory birds.

6. Community Engagement and Education: We believe that the future of conservation depends on an informed and engaged public. Our education programs reach thousands of individuals annually, from school children to adults, fostering a deep appreciation for nature. We offer workshops, guided nature walks, citizen science opportunities, and more, to inspire the next generation of conservationists.

Specific Needs & Issues to Be Addressed

The Willistown area is under constant pressure from development, threatening the very landscapes that define our region. The growing fragmentation of habitats and loss of agricultural land pose significant risks to local wildlife, water quality, and community well-being. To counter these threats, we need to ensure the long-term viability of our conservation programs.

Our current needs include:

- **Stewardship and Monitoring:** Maintaining our conserved lands requires ongoing monitoring, habitat restoration, and adaptive management. This work is vital to protect the ecological health of our landscapes.
- **Community Outreach and Education:** Expanding our community engagement efforts is critical to building broader support for conservation and fostering a conservation ethic in the region.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Continued investment in Rushton Farm is necessary to maintain its productivity, enhance its educational programming, and support our bird conservation research.
- **Watershed Protection Program:** Support the ongoing efforts fund and grow our streamside restoration work and The Darby Creek Community Science Monitoring Program, established in 2021. This collaborative project aims to create a network of training and mentoring opportunities to empower the neighbors of Darby and Cobbs Creek watersheds to collect high quality stream data and become water advocates for their community.
- **Bird Conservation Program:** Expanding the funding for continued research and Bird banding activities at Rushton Woods Preserve. Thousands of birds have been documented by our banding team, revealing a vibrant, thriving population of birds that use our open spaces as an important stopover during migration or as a permanent home for their breeding and nesting sites.

Why It Is Important to Fund This Now

The need for robust conservation efforts has never been more urgent. The pressures on our natural landscapes are intensifying, and without immediate action, we risk losing the unique environmental and agricultural heritage of the Willistown area. General operating support will enable us to respond flexibly to emerging threats and opportunities, ensuring that our work remains effective and impactful.

Moreover, as we face the challenges of climate change, protecting and restoring our natural lands becomes even more critical. Healthy ecosystems play a key role in carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, and supporting biodiversity. By investing in the Trust's general operations, you will be contributing to these essential functions, which benefit not only our local community but also the broader region.

How Impact & Results Will Be Demonstrated

We are committed to transparency and accountability in all our work. The impact of your support will be measured and reported through:

- **Conservation Metrics:** We track the acres of land protected, the success of habitat restoration projects, and the biodiversity supported by our efforts, particularly through our bird banding and water monitoring programs.
- **Community Engagement and Education:** We measure the reach and effectiveness of our educational programs by tracking participant numbers, volunteer hours, and feedback from event attendees.
- **Agricultural Output:** Rushton Farm's productivity, including the quantity of food produced and distributed to local food banks, is carefully monitored. We also evaluate the educational impact of our farm-based programs.

III. ATTACHMENTS

Email this support information. If it is on your website, please provide the URL.

1. Copy of **501 (c) (3)** federal tax-exempt letter **See email attachment**
 2. List of **Board** of Directors, with their affiliations **URL: [OUR STAFF AND TRUSTEES](#)**
 3. Most recent **annual report** **URL: [2025 Spring Sycamore Newsletter by Willistown Conservation Trust - Issue](#)**
 4. Audited or reviewed recent **financial statement** **URL: [See email attachments for 2024 990 and 2024 Audit Financial Statement](#)**
 5. Itemized **organizational operating budget** with actual results for prior fiscal year & current fiscal year to date **See email attachment**
 6. ~~If capacity building initiative, **itemized budget** (including external consultant's proposal, if applicable)~~
 7. Current **strategic plan**. See: [STRATEGIC PLAN](#)
- Visit our website to learn more at www.chescocf.org
 - Proposals are only accepted electronically: <https://chescocf.org/receive/apply-for-grants/>
 - **Email proposals to grants@chescocf.org**
 - Proposals are considered "complete" when CCCF has **confirmed** receipt of the **Grant Proposal Summary Sheet, Narrative & Attachments**.
 - Proposals are shared electronically and online with Fund Advisors, Donors & Grant Panels.
 - Per IRS Regulations, applicants must be charitable, tax-exempt organizations with 501(c)(3) certification & cannot be individuals.

Please contact Kevin Baffa, Grants Administrator or Stephenie Stevens, Grants Officer at **(610) 696-8211** or grants@chescocf.org with any questions.