



Action. Access. Progress.

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
GROUNDEDINPHILLY.ORG IMPROVEMENTS**

JUNE, 2018

**PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER
1709 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN PARKWAY, SECOND FLOOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19103**

WWW.PUBINTLAW.ORG | FACEBOOK.COM/PUBLICINTERESLAWCENTER | @PUBINTLAWCTR

DEADLINE

Submit by email by 5 p.m. on Monday, July 23, 2018

CONTACT

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MISSION

The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to advance the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region facing discrimination, inequality, and poverty. We use litigation, community education, advocacy, and organizing to secure their access to fundamental resources and services including: a high-quality public education, healthcare, employment, housing, safe and healthy neighborhoods, and the right to vote.

BACKGROUND

Philadelphia has a rich history of community gardening and of distributing harvest to the hungry—community gardens give more food directly to hungry people than any other form of urban agriculture. And gardens provide ample co-benefits, from ecosystem services to community cohesion, cultural preservation, and youth leadership development.

But, gardeners and farmers face the persistent threat of eviction and multiple obstacles to long-term land tenure. These include the complex, bureaucratic processes of multiple city agencies involved with land acquisition and access, combined with lack of political will to support gardens, complex tax policies, zoning regulations, and competing interests. This confusing web leaves community gardens in limbo, or worse, removed from land they have tended for decades.

Through our Garden Justice Legal Initiative, we provide legal, technical, organizing and education to community gardeners and market farmers that are working to ensure gardens and farms in Philadelphia are preserved for the long-term. One of our goals is to meet the unmet need for information about the city's 40,000 vacant parcels and how to return them to productive use and put them in the hands of gardeners.

In 2013 we created www.GroundedInPhilly.org, an innovative web-based mapping and organizing tool that provides users easy access to information about vacant lots. The website draws from multiple data sources, and informs users of the status of vacant lots including ownership, zoning, and liabilities, among other characteristics. For example, a person looking to start a garden in her neighborhood can use the website to identify nearby vacant lots, determine if the lots are publicly or privately owned or already in use, find out if the lot is currently up for sale and if so, how much it costs, see the size of the lot and its zoning designation, and determine which City Council district it is located in.

The website also includes [resources](#) such as our online toolkit that provides information on potential pathways for securing access to vacant land, obtaining proper zoning, addressing soil safety, accessing water sources and dealing with storm water billing, among other topics. A final, important feature of Grounded in Philly is that it connects online users such that neighbors can connect with neighbors to gain access to specific parcels or, for established gardens, learn how access to those spaces might be made more permanent.

Since its launch, over 67,000 people have used Grounded In Philly. More than 200 neighbors have used the tool to rally around more than 100 vacant lots to start new gardens. New and established garden groups alike are using the site. For example, One Art Community Center located in West Philadelphia is a ten-year-old urban oasis created by neighbors on vacant land, providing the neighborhood with everything from a community garden to artist workshop space. Neighbors have tried to gain access to additional nearby lots to expand their space to no avail.

Through Grounded In Philly and our assistance, they were able to identify the owners of the land and connect with their city council member for help gaining access to it.

Grounded In Philly has also provided us opportunities to understand in real time what is happening on the ground. While conducting research for the website, we found out that more than 70 community gardens were on land that was being offered for sale by the city. The garden groups themselves had no idea. We reached out to each of these gardens and let them know, in person or by leaving materials on site, that they were at risk of losing their land. For some, we provided direct legal service to help gardens stay the sale of their land.

This tool and the accompanying services are unique in Philadelphia. We are the primary organization in the city making vacant land data usable and accessible for community gardeners and market farmers. And no other organization couples this access with the legal resources we are able to provide both online and in person in response to online requests.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Grounded in Philly needs upgrades and additional resources so it can fully live up to its potential. Much of the data the Law Center relies on, including existing garden data, is out of date and no longer in line with current needs.

First, the City of Philadelphia has made additional data sources available to us since we first launched the site, which will take some resources to incorporate into our map. These data sets include information about gardens that exist on publicly-owned parcels. Second, experience with the site shows that we also need to improve some of the site functionality, including our ability to post information about upcoming vacant land trainings, events and advocacy opportunities. By making these improvements we will increase access to information for gardeners and farmers so that more residents can protect or create the food-production and neighborhood spaces that are critical to community health.

SCOPE OF WORK

We envision the selected vendor will help us hone this scope of work and determine which of these activities will be most fruitful and worthy of our time and financial resources.

The vendor will work with the Law Center staff to upgrade its GroundedinPhilly.org website, focusing on three main goals:

1. Update existing open data sources to make use of newly available or updated data;
2. Optimize back end operations; and
3. Enhance user experience.

The website currently operates on the Django platform. Grounded In Philly also needs to be updated to a secure https web address.

Updating Data

The Law Center currently uses data from the following locations:

- [Parcel outlines](#) from the city's Records Department.
- [Land use designations](#), from the City Planning Commission.

- [Permeability data](#) by parcel from the Water Department.
- [Vacancy licenses and violations](#) from [Licenses & Inspections](#).
- The Redevelopment Authority's Available Properties are fetched from [this API](#).

The following is a list of data sources that the Law Center desires to incorporate into the upgrade:

- [L&I Code Violations](#);
- [L&I Building Permits](#);
- [L&I Appeals of Code Violations & Permit Refusals](#);
- Billing information via the [OPA API](#):
 - Property Assessment Data;
 - [Property Tax Balances](#);
 - Payment Balances (to be visible only on the backend);
- City Owned Vacant Property API;
- Building and zoning permits;
- Vacant Property Indicators;
- [Neighborhood Advisory Committees](#);
- [Current photos](#);
- Sheriff's Sale Data; and
- Municipal Lien data (currently only available through a database accessible at the Prothonotary's office).

Back End Improvements

We would also like to improve our ability to program the website by updating the back-end of the site. For example, some current problems include:

- inability to control the size of pictures for blog entries;
- we are not able to reuse media files and photos that were previously saved or erase outdated media files, and we are unable to reach media files from the dashboard; and
- emails submitted through the website contain embedded characters instead of apostrophes, making them difficult to read.

We would like the vendor to solve these problems and make the backend of the site more intuitive and user friendly. In addition to these general problems, we also want the vendor to make the following improvements:

- Update the starburst symbol that currently identifies gardens, as it takes up too much space on the map;
- Rectify discrepancies between the map legend and the filter, such as the “in use” and “lots with activity” language;
- Improve the functionality of the map filter and the tool that shows how many vacant lots and community gardens are currently in view; and
- Make it easier to upload resources, such as adding access to the Vacant Land Tool Kit to the “Get involved” page.

Enhancing User Experience

We need to enhance the GroundedinPhilly.org user experience by making several improvements to the interactive map. The first user improvement would entail improving the accuracy of Google Street View, so that it more consistently shows a view of the address of a selected lot. Secondly, the selected vendor would re-envision how gardens and vacant land are identified on the map. Currently, GroundedinPhilly.org identifies parcels by the following information:

- Publicly owned;
- Privately owned;
- In use;
- Lots with activity.

Through the upgrade, the Law Center hopes to accomplish the following:

- Add an additional category for parcels that were once gardens but have been lost; and,
- Create a category for privately-owned land that owners wish to make available for gardening.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Awards of the contract resulting from this RFP will be based upon the most responsive vendor whose offer will be most advantageous to the Public Interest Law Center in terms of cost, functionality, and other factors as specified elsewhere in this RFP.

The Law Center reserves the right to:

- Reject any or all offers and discontinue this RFP process without obligation or liability to any potential vendor;
- Accept other than the lowest priced offer;
- Award a contract on the basis of initial offers received, without discussions or requests for best or final offers; and,
- Award more than one contract.

Vendor's proposals shall be submitted as set forth below. The vendor should confine its submission to those matters sufficient to define its proposal, and to provide an adequate basis for the Law Center's evaluation of the vendor's proposal.

Proposals in response to this RFP will be incorporated into the final agreement between the Law Center and the selected Vendor. The submitted proposals should include the following information:

- Provide a brief summary of your relevant experience, including:
 - Resume or similar information that demonstrates your ability to provide the services requested
 - Experience and expertise working with similar data sources and online tools
 - What distinguishes you from others who may respond.
- Approach and Methodology

- Anticipated Deliverables and Project Timeline
- Detailed and Itemized Project Budget
 - The Law Center has designated \$3,000 for this project.
 - Vendor should make note of whether the budget is based on an hourly rate or a flat fee for the agreed upon scope of work.
 - Vendor should make clear the cost of each recommended process or task.
 - It is acceptable to provide a budget range pending the outcome of meetings with Law Center staff, following receipt of proposals.
- References and Samples: Provide names of three references for similar projects and samples of related projects.

TIMELINE

Deadline for submissions is 5 p.m. on Monday, July 23, 2018.

All proposals should be sent by email to:
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