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‘Water: Designing an Equitable Water Future for NYC’ Invites New Yorkers to Submit New Project Ideas

Design Trust for Public Space Launches 12th Open Request for Proposals Call

New York, NY – Today, the Design Trust for Public Space opens its 12th Request for Proposals (RFP) cycle, a citywide call for project ideas that address key public space challenges. The 2025 RFP theme “Water: Designing an Equitable Water Future for New York City,” aims to incubate solutions to the pressures exerted on New York by too much or too little water and envision new approaches to city-making, including commitment to innovative green infrastructure, well-planned coastal resilience, access to waterfronts and waterways, and connecting New Yorkers with the cultural vibrancy and memory inherent in our water.

The Water RFP recognizes that the future of the city’s public life depends on shifting our relationship with water in all its various forms—rain, oceans, rivers—and the multiple ways we engage with it—construction, art, play, drinking, sewage.

To do so, the Design Trust invites New Yorkers to turn their ideas for a more equitable water future into actionable solutions. The two-year initiative will develop up to five water project proposals into tangible initiatives, supported by \$10,000 in funding and an incubation process guided by the Design Trust and an advisory committee of city agencies, community stakeholders, and design experts.

Over the Design Trust’s 30 year history as an incubator for new projects and research that unlock the potential of NYC’s shared spaces, applicants have ranged from designers and urban planning experts to city agencies to invested local citizens without any city-making expertise. Past RFPs, like *The Restorative City*, produced a convening of public health experts to confront health inequity in the built environment, and projects like [The Neurodiverse City](#), an initiative imagining how public spaces can be more inclusive for neurodivergent New Yorkers. *The Energetic City* resulted in [The World’s Park](#), an effort to reconnect Queens neighbors with Flushing Meadows Corona Park, and [Opening the Edge](#), a project at the Lillian Wald Houses in the Lower East Side that transformed thinking around public spaces in public housing sites through participatory design.

“Water has shaped the contours of all life in New York City—from the resilience of our neighborhoods to the health of our ecosystems and how we cool down, eat, drink and play,” said **Matthew Clarke, Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space**. “With this RFP, we’re inviting New Yorkers to imagine bold solutions that will not only confront the urgent challenges of climate change and water access, but also transform the way we live with, design for, and celebrate the water that produces the best bagels in the world.”

“At the Design Trust, we know that the seeds for the most transformative ideas are already being planted in our neighborhoods by community members,” said **Eve Klein, PhD, Design Trust for Public**

Space Board Chair. “The Water RFP will offer the structure, resources, and partnerships to support those visions to take root and thrive.”

“Water is more than what flows through our pipes — it’s a vital resource that nourishes our bodies, connects our neighborhoods, shapes our communities, inspires our culture, and teaches us resilience,” said **DEP Commissioner Rohit T. Aggarwala.** “This RFP invites every New Yorker to reimagine the city’s relationship with water. I’m thrilled to see the Design Trust for Public Space champion bold ideas that will help build a more equitable and water-wise future for New York City.”

“The story of New York City is the story of its water,” said **Daphne Lundi, Managing Director at Urban Ocean Lab and Design Trust Water Climate Resilience and Design Fellow and Advisory Committee Member.** “Our 520 miles of shoreline, along with our watershed and sewers, form a vast visible and invisible network that sustains millions of people every day. We interact with water in big ways and small ways, from turning on a faucet to sitting by a pond to swimming in a pool. Climate change is redefining that relationship as flooding and sea level rise continue to challenge the systems we rely on every day. This RFP invites us to honor New York City’s history with water while imagining a future in which water remains a source of connection, culture, and resilience for all New Yorkers.”

“With this RFP, the Design Trust continues its leadership in showing how design can transform public life,” said **Dara N. Byrne, PhD, Water RFP Advisory Committee Member and CUNY Macaulay Honors College Dean.** “It’s an invitation to imagine a future where every New Yorker is connected to the life, memory, and possibility of our waters, a city where resilience and equity flow together.”

“New York City is a city of islands,” said **Alice Shay, Principal at Buro Happold and Water RFP Advisory Committee Member.** “Water influences all our daily lives – both for good with our waterfront parks, incredible water supply system, and our ferries and in many challenging ways with rising tides, stormwater flooding, and legacies of contamination. The design of our infrastructure is a political act. It is imperative to ensure that our waterways and water systems support the lives of all New Yorkers. We are honored to sponsor the Design Trust in their next open call for ideas, which has laid the groundwork for so many of NYC’s innovative projects. We look forward to working with the finalists to reflect on and invent new ways to engage with our city’s waters.”

“Communities like ours along the Bronx River and across the city have always carried the knowledge and vision for a healthier, more connected relationship with our waterways,” said **Siddhartha Sánchez, Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance and Water RFP Advisory Committee Member.** “The Water RFP recognizes that those closest to the water are the ones shaping its future, and it creates a pathway for their ideas to become real, lasting solutions for all New Yorkers.”

“Increasingly facing the risks of floods and droughts, many cities including New York are at an inflection point for action,” said **Vincent Lee, Principal at Arup and Water RFP Advisory Committee Member.** “We can push our creative minds in addressing how water and cities can co-exist to improve equity, integrate nature, leverage technology, and enable accessibility. Arup is proud to sponsor this initiative, and I look forward to reviewing the many innovative and thoughtful ideas that will be put forth.”

“I’m honored to serve as an Advisory Board Member for the Design Trust’s newest Open Call focused on water, and what an equitable water future means for New York City,” said **Terri Carta, Executive Director of Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy and Water RFP Advisory Committee Member.** “As stewards of a third of NYC’s 520 miles of shoreline, I’m excited to help

elevate meaningful projects that celebrate and improve our connection to water, and ensure equitable access and benefit of this incredible resource.”

“In New York City, water can be harnessed as a regenerative force when we design in collaboration with nature,” said **Lisette Mendez-Boyer, AIA, AICP, LEED AP, Studio Design Leader, Cities & Communities, and Vice President at HKS, and Water RFP Advisory Committee Member.** “It can connect people, place, and planet - opening pathways to healthier communities, resilient neighborhoods, and a more equitable urban future. A future reimaged through a harmonious relationship with nature.”

The Water RFP kicked off last night at the Whitney Museum of American Art as a part of [Climate Week NYC](#), with a panel conversation featuring artists, urban planners, and infrastructure experts exploring the intersections of public space and water in a city of islands.

The application process begins with a short initial Statement of Interest (SOI) available now until **November 10, 2025**. Design Trust will identify roughly 20-25 finalists and invite them to submit a full proposal by February 2026, of which 10 will be interviewed by the Water Advisory Committee. Five final projects will be chosen, and winners will be announced in Spring 2026.

Follow the link below for more information on the application process, the advisory committee, key deadlines, and how interested applicants can determine if their project is a right fit:

Learn more about the Water RFP and apply at www.designtrust.org/rfp

Subscribe to the public space newsletter for updates on the Water RFP [here](#). Learn more about our two online RFP information sessions [here](#).

Design Trust for Public Space leadership is available for further comment. Please contact Alexa Mauzy-Lewis (amauzy@designtrust.org) to coordinate an interview.

The Water RFP is sponsored by the Woodner Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, HKS, Arup, and Buro Happold.

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About the Design Trust for Public Space

The [Design Trust for Public Space](#) is a non-profit organization that unlocks the potential of New York’s public spaces. Our unique model catalyzes design ideas into action for a more just and equitable city. Founded in 1995 by Andrea Woodner on the tenet that New York City’s cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, today, the Design Trust is a nationally recognized incubator and thought leader that transforms New York City’s shared civic spaces—streets, plazas, parks, public buildings, transportation, and housing developments—to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city.