



Pennsylvania
Creative Industries

Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

2026-2027 Application Guidelines

Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program

Application opens: October 1, 2026, 9 AM EST, and can be accessed at keystonecreatives.org

Application closes: December 31, 2026, 9 PM EST

Application Status Notification: Anticipated date to inform applicants of status: March 1, 2027

Grant activity period:

- Growth Grant Funding Tier: March 1, 2027 – August 31, 2027
- Impact Grant Funding Tier: March 15, 2027 – October 31, 2027

Grant amount: Grant Funds are distributed at either a Growth Grant Funding Tier amount of up to \$4,000, or an Impact Grant Funding Tier amount of up to \$17,000, in addition to business planning resources.

Please see below for eligibility requirements and specifications for application to both funding tiers.

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About Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Pennsylvania Creative Industries is the new flagship brand of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency. With this name, the Council aims to elevate the creative sector's visibility, engage broader audiences, foster collaboration across disciplines, and underscore creativity's vital role in innovation, economic growth, and community vitality.

In 2025, our Council adopted a new strategic plan with the mission to empower, connect, and amplify creatives and creative industries and their contributions to Pennsylvania's communities, economy, and workforce. Our vision is that Pennsylvania becomes the national leader among states for creative communities, talent, and industries.

To maximize impact and align with state community and economic development goals, Pennsylvania Creative Industries invests resources in five key areas:

- Asset Development (e.g., creative organizations, entrepreneurial ecosystem, technical assistance, regional networking).
- Workforce Development (e.g., creative skills, career awareness, and employment pathways).
- Community Development (e.g., creative placemaking, engagement with local governments, and networking for practitioners).
- Visibility (e.g., promotion of creative industries, products and services, and of the contributions and opportunities within our commonwealth's creative sector).
- Policy (e.g., creation of policies that promote and foster relevancy and opportunity for creative industries, within governmental and non-governmental agencies and businesses).

Creative Industries Defined

Creative industries encompass individuals, organizations, and businesses that generate goods, services, and intellectual property through creative work. This includes, but is not limited to, advertising, architecture, performing and visual arts, design, crafts, music, media and film production, publishing, and digital games. Innovation, technology, and creative expression unite these diverse sectors.

In 2023, our commonwealth's creative industries contributed \$30B to Pennsylvania's economy and supported nearly 190K jobs. Learn more [here](#).

About Bridgeway Capital

Bridgeway Capital is a nonprofit social impact lender and a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) certified by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Our mission is to combat financial injustices and advance opportunities by building capacity, investing capital, and revitalizing underserved places.

Since our founding in 1990, Bridgeway has deployed more than \$320 million in financing to small businesses and nonprofits that create jobs, provide essential products and services, and drive community revitalization. Beyond lending, Bridgeway equips entrepreneurs with the tools they need to succeed. We offer one-on-one technical assistance, cohort-based business education programs, networking opportunities, access to new markets, impact measurement support, and both grant and loan financing.

Through these programs, entrepreneurs strengthen their financial and management skills, grow sustainable businesses, create quality jobs, revitalize commercial corridors and underused properties, and increase opportunities for Pennsylvania's creative economy and underserved communities.

To learn more about Bridgeway Capital, visit <https://bridgewaycapital.org>.

How Pennsylvania Creative Industries and Bridgeway Capital Work Together

Pennsylvania Creative Industries collaborates with Bridgeway Capital as the Statewide Administrator for the Pennsylvania Creative Industries' Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program. As the Statewide Administrator, Bridgeway Capital oversees the application process, programmatic activities, and re-granting of Pennsylvania Creative Industries funds to support Creative Entrepreneurs statewide. Please note that although Bridgeway Capital is a lending institution, the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program is a grant program, and for purposes of this program, Bridgeway Capital will be granting funds to eligible and successful applicants.

About the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) Program

Creative businesses are invaluable contributors to the commercial and cultural vitality of Pennsylvania communities. They drive innovation, deliver products and services, generate economic opportunities, and enhance community identity. Pennsylvania Creative Industries offers the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) Program to creative entrepreneurs who aspire to grow their for-profit creative businesses in ways that positively impact their communities. The program encourages participation from creative entrepreneurs across the Commonwealth, including those located in low-income, urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Bridgeway Capital works in collaboration with Pennsylvania Creative Industries as the Statewide Administrator of this program. CEA Program applicants that are both eligible and have an application that is successful in the panel review process, will receive either a Growth Grant up to \$4,000 or an Impact Grant up to \$17,000 in conjunction with two levels of business assistance support during the grant activity period. These grant tiers are outlined in more detail below. At a high level, the Impact Grant, up to \$17,000 in funding, is for established creative businesses to invest in activities that positively impact their communities while supporting business growth and long-term sustainability. The Growth Grant, up to \$4,000, is for emerging to established creative businesses to pursue opportunities that support market expansion and/or financial resilience. A range of business assistance resources will also be offered to grantees based on their grant tier.

Grant funding through the CEA program is limited in each grant cycle and therefore is competitive. A select group of panelists throughout the state will review all applications. Non-selection is not an indicator of business value, and if an applicant is not awarded in any given grant year, applicants are encouraged to re-apply in the following available grant cycle.

Impact Grant Tier

Overview

The Impact Grant tier provides up to \$17,000 to selected applicants whose goals and usage of funds will enhance the long-term sustainability of their creative business, plus deliver community impact. Grant recipients are chosen through a competitive review process. If selected, awardees must complete all required tasks including a review of their proposed usage of funds during the two-month peer cohort to receive funds.

The Impact Grant will prioritize applicants seeking to create meaningful community impact aligned with their business goals. Community impact may include, but is not limited to, growing a small business in a low- to moderate-income (LMI) area; activating underutilized property in an LMI area; or creating quality jobs that offer a living wage and benefits. Applicants are responsible for explaining how this catalytic grant investment will help their creative business grow and thrive while also generating positive benefits for the community in which they operate.

Specific Eligibility

This opportunity is for established businesses with annual revenue greater than or equal to \$50,000 up to \$2,000,000. Applicants must have been in business and a resident of Pennsylvania for at least one year and possess the tax documentation needed to verify their stated revenue levels. Creative businesses awarded the Impact Grant will not be eligible for a second, subsequent Impact Grant for three years and/or grant cycles after being awarded. Please see eligibility below under terms and conditions for more general eligibility requirements.

Cohort Requirements

Impact Grantees will be required to join a peer-cohort with other awardees in the grant tier. They will participate in up to 10 hours of one-on-one business coaching and 3 virtual peer gatherings over a two-month period in which they will have an opportunity to refine their proposed usage of funds. This ensures the planned usage of funds is aligned with the business's overall growth strategy.

In addition to the required cohort classes, optional webinars featuring creative business success stories and subject-matter experts will be offered through the grant's activity period. Optional, in-person peer gatherings focused on exploring and elevating creative businesses impact will also be held in regional locations around Pennsylvania.

Required Tasks

If selected, the awardee must complete the following for payment receipt:

- Submit the prior year tax return to verify gross revenue range selected in application
- Sign and return awardee agreement
- Commit to a 3-session, virtual, peer cohort over the course of 2 months, at least one private business coaching session, and check-in(s) throughout the grant activity period
- Submit a finalized usage of funds plan
- Complete the business assessment
- Submit W-9 Form for payment processing and tax purposes
- Submit banking account and routing information for direct deposit (no checks will be issued)
- Agree to a two-step reporting process after the activity period ends; (1) A form with outcome-related questions at the end of the activity period and (2) a post-business assessment approximately one year after receiving the funds.

Timeline

- Application Opens: October 1, 2026, at 9:00am EST
- Application Closes: December 31, 2026, at 9:00pm EST
- Acceptance/Declination Notification Anticipated By: March 1, 2027
- Cohort and business coaching (Virtual):

- Class 1: Thursday March 18th, 2027, 6:00-8:00 pm
- Class 2: Thursday April 8th, 2027, 6:00-8:00 pm
- Class 3: Thursday April 29th, 2027, 6:00-8:00 pm
- Payment: Mid-March through Mid-May 2027, after completing required tasks listed above
- Activity Period: From receipt of funds to October 31, 2027, approximately a 7-month period*
- Final Reporting:
 - (1) an outcomes-related survey
 - (2) a second business assessment

**Funds must be 100% spent within this timeframe. Activities, if not entirely complete, must have meaningful progress by the close of the activity period and reported on the outcomes related survey.*

Growth Grant Tier

Overview

The amount of the Growth Grant is up to \$4,000 and is awarded upon being selected by a panel of reviewers and completing all required tasks. The grant will prioritize applicants pursuing business growth goals that lead to greater sustainability of the business and financial resilience of the owner. Applicants are responsible for explaining how this catalytic grant investment will help their creative business grow and thrive.

Additional Benefits: Throughout the entire grant period, grantees will have access to a variety of technical assistance, at no cost, including optional webinars featuring creative business success stories and subject-matter experts will be offered through the grant's activity period. Optional, in-person peer gatherings focused on exploring and elevating creative businesses impact will also be held in regional locations around Pennsylvania.

Specific Eligibility

This opportunity is for businesses with annual revenue greater than or equal to \$10,000 up to \$2,000,000. Applicants must have been in business and a resident of Pennsylvania for at least one year and possess the tax documentation needed to verify their stated revenue levels. Creative businesses awarded the Growth Grant will not be eligible for a second, subsequent Growth Grant for three years and/or grant cycles after being awarded. Please see eligibility below under terms and conditions for more general eligibility requirements.

Required Tasks

If selected for this grant the awardee must complete the following for payment receipt:

- Submit most recent tax return to verify selected annual gross revenue range.
- Sign and return awardee agreement
- Submit W-9 Form for payment processing and tax purposes.
- Submit Banking account and routing information for direct deposit (no checks will be issued).
- Complete a business assessment.
- Agree to complete a Post Business Growth Assessment and final reporting documentation at the end of the activity period.

Timeline

- Application Opens: October 1, 2026, at 9:00am EST
- Application Closes: December 31, 2026, at 9:00pm EST
- Acceptance/Declination Notification Anticipated By: March 1, 2027
- Payment: Starting March 1, *after completing required tasks listed above
- Activity Period: From receipt of funds to August 31, 2027, approximately a 6-month period*
- Final Reporting:
 - (1) an outcomes-related survey
 - (2) a second business assessment

**Funds must be 100% spent within this timeframe. Activities, if not entirely complete, must have meaningful progress by the close of the activity period and reported on the outcomes related survey.*

Program Features

Funding Amount

Grant funds are distributed either at an amount up to \$4,000 or an amount up to \$17,000 in addition to business planning resources. Please see above for specific eligibility requirements for tiers, please see below for eligibility requirements and specifications for application to both funding tiers.

Payment Method

- This is a non-reimbursement-based grant program, which means grantees receive funding before eligible expenses are incurred or paid. The grantee is responsible for using the funds only for approved project costs and must comply with all grant requirements, including reporting and documentation, as outlined in the grant agreement.
- Grant funds will be disbursed in a single lump-sum payment via Ramp, a secure payment platform, using direct deposit. Payment will not be issued until all required program tasks have been completed and all documentation necessary to verify eligibility and compliance has been submitted and approved by Bridgeway Capital.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be at least 18 years of age and a current resident of Pennsylvania for at least one year.
- Be able to provide tax documentation verifying that you have been in business and have been operating in Pennsylvania for at least one year.
- Be a creative entrepreneur operating a small business as a Sole Proprietorship, Limited Liability Company (LLC), Partnership (GP/LP/LLP), or Corporation (C or S). Employees of the creative business are not eligible to apply for and/or participate in the CEA Program on the owner's and/or partners' behalf.
- Be a creative entrepreneur operating a business in Pennsylvania within one or more of the following creative industry areas:
 - Marketing – Advertising and marketing agencies & professionals
 - Architecture – Architecture firms & architects
 - Visual Arts & Crafts – Galleries, artists, artisans & makers, tattoo artists
 - Design – Product, interior, graphic, and fashion design firms and designers
 - Film & Media – Film, video, animation, TV & Radio businesses

- Digital Games – Companies, programmers & individuals producing games.
- Music & Entertainment –Producers, venues, musicians & performers
- Publishing – Print or electronic businesses & content creators, editors & writers

Please note: Creative entrepreneurs are defined as businesses that design and produce original artistic or crafted outputs in the form of products and services. They should have high authorship, and revenue should be primarily driven by creative work. PCI reserves the right to review all applicants to determine their level of creative entrepreneurship as it relates to this grant.

- Possess all current and valid licenses, permits, leases, certifications, and registrations required to engage in the creative endeavor (e.g., tattooing or street performance) in the geographical location served by the entrepreneur.
- The CEA grant is funded through a program that activates state taxpayer funding and typically creates tax obligations for grant recipients. For further questions regarding tax obligations and filing, please visit the IRS website at irs.gov or consult with a tax professional.
- As a form of impact reporting, all grantees will be required to complete a business assessment before receiving any grant payment and again at the end of the grant reporting period.
- Grantees will need to provide a narrative and/or evidence of eligible use of the CEA grant funding at the end of the grant activity period. See Application Process section in these guidelines for more information.
- Creative businesses awarded the Growth Grant will not be eligible for the Growth Grant for three years and/or grant cycles after being selected. They may apply for the Impact Grant in the following year and/or grant cycle.
- Creative businesses awarded the Impact Grant will not be eligible for the Impact Grant for three years and/or grant cycles after being selected. They may apply for the Growth Grant in the following year and/or grant cycle.
- For the new and updated 2026–2027 CEA Program grant opportunity, all past CEA Program grantees will be eligible to apply under the revised eligibility above. After the 2026–2027 CEA Grant period, creative entrepreneurs will be eligible to apply for future CEA Program grant cycles in accordance with the rules above.

Ineligible Applicants

- Any previous CEA grantee in a “non-current” status. Non-current status is defined as a grantee that did not submit a final report, business assessment and/or upload final data or otherwise did not successfully adhere to the award agreement requirements of the grant (i.e. misuse of funds). In some cases, a non-current status can be rectified; email CEAP@bridgewaycapital.org for instructions on becoming current in order to be eligible to reapply.
- CEA grantees that were awarded during the 2025-2026 grant cycle (grantees from this cycle are eligible to apply starting with the anticipated 2027-2028 CEA program grant cycle).

Eligible Uses of Funds

Funds must support business formation or development. Eligible funds should act as an activator to your business growth and sustainability. Eligible uses of funds include:

- Professional fees for workshops, consultants, and career coaching.
- Participation in events, trade shows, festivals, etc. that offer access to audience and revenue generation potential.
- Business development fees for courses or seminars for business skills.
- Research and development.
- Marketing and promotion.

- Development or upgrades to technology related to business practices.
- Studio/rehearsal/retail space rent (outside of regular business operating costs, rent, and utilities)
- Reasonable fees for supporting/collaborating artists.
- Purchase of supplies and/or equipment.

Funding Restrictions

Grant funds cannot be used for any of the following:

- Activities outside the funding period.
- Activities that have a religious purpose.
- Payments to lobbyists.
- Activities for which academic credit is given.
- Competitions, cash prizes and awards
- Benefit activities
- Performances and exhibitions not available to the public.
- Offsets to regular business operating costs, including regular salary or wages.
- Hospitality expenses including but not limited to food, beverages, gifts, and receptions.
- Direct or indirect participation in a political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.
- Attempts to influence legislation.
- Leaseholder improvements to spaces not owned by the creative business.
- Resolving maintenance or operational issues for owned and/or leased property.

Crediting Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Grantees must prominently acknowledge Pennsylvania Creative Industries funding in promotions, flyers, programs, media announcements, press releases, websites, social media that relate to this grant, by utilizing approved logos, branding, and materials. Pennsylvania Creative Industries will provide said materials to the grantee.

Photo, Media, and Communications Release

Awardees grant Pennsylvania Creative Industries and Bridgeway Capital permission to use photographs, video recordings, testimonials, and other media that may include the awardee, their business, or grant-funded activities for promotional, educational, reporting, and marketing purposes. Awardees also consent to receive program-related communications, including emails, newsletters, surveys, and updates from both Pennsylvania Creative Industries and Bridgeway Capital. These materials and communications may be delivered without additional compensation or notice, and awardees may opt out of non-required communications at any time.

Application Process and Review Process

Application Process

This program is administered Statewide by Bridgeway Capital. To learn more about the program and the process for applying please refer to the Keystone Creatives website www.keystonecreatives.org

Access the Application

- Visit [Keystone Creatives](http://www.keystonecreatives.org). Follow the application link to the Blackbaud grant portal and make an account

- Create a Blackbaud account
- Complete an eligibility screener within the Blackbaud system
- Review all other terms and conditions in these guidelines including eligibility to confirm you meet all guidelines along with helpful [FAQ's](#).

Complete the Full Application

- Eligible applicants will answer short narrative questions about their business, growth goals, community impact, and proposed use of grant funds and submit a budget through their Blackbaud account.
- Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to work with a business advisor or technical assistance provider, such as their local [Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#) and/or [LaunchBox](#) to strengthen their application and project plan.

Application Review

- Applications will be reviewed by a panel from across Pennsylvania. Due to the limits of funding in each grant cycle, not all eligible applicants will receive an award. Applicants who are not selected are encouraged to re-apply in future grant cycles.

Award Selection & Verification

- Selected applicants must submit their most recent tax return to verify revenue, sign an Awardee Agreement, and complete a business assessment before moving forward in the program. They will then be prompted to complete all required tasks for their specific grant tier.

Receive Grant Funds

- Once all required documentation, onboarding tasks, and program requirements have been completed and approved, grant funds will be distributed in a single lump-sum payment via Ramp, a secure payment platform, using direct deposit.

Implement Your Project & Complete Reporting

- Awardees must use grant funds within the activity period and for eligible project activities and maintain documentation of outcomes.
- At the conclusion of the activity period, awardees must complete required reporting, including an outcomes survey and a follow-up business assessment.

Extension of Activity Period

Awardees may request an extension of the grant activity period when unexpected circumstances affect their ability to complete approved activities within the established timeframe. Extension requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and must be submitted in writing before the end of the original activity period. Approval of an extension is not guaranteed and will be granted at the sole discretion of Bridgeway Capital, based on the circumstances presented and the objectives of the grant program.

Appeals Process

Bridgeway Capital recognizes that errors may occur during the grant application review process. Applicants may submit a written appeal if they believe their application was misrepresented or improperly reviewed through no fault of their own. Appeals must be addressed to Bridgeway Capital and submitted in writing within ten (10) business days of the award notification to, CEAP@bridgewaycapital.org, and must clearly identify the error or omission and its impact on the review outcome. Bridgeway Capital will promptly forward all appeals to the Pennsylvania Creative Industries CEA Program Director for review. Appeals will only be considered when the error had a substantial effect on the evaluation process and may not be used to challenge the qualitative assessment of an application. Missing application deadlines or required materials are not grounds for appeal. If an appeal is approved, funding will be awarded only if funds are available.

Grants under this program are processed under the authority of the act of January 25, 1966 (P.L. 1542 (1965), 71 P.S. Section 1530.1 et seq., as amended, and 58 Pa. Code §301.