Pennsylvania
Creative Industries
Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

2027-2028 Application Guidelines

Pathways Program

Application Opens: January 11, 2027
Application Closes: February 22, 2027
Performance Period: January 1, 2027-December 31, 2028

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About Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Pennsylvania Creative Industries is the new flagship brand of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA), 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 this Program

This program supports multi-year, tiered, technical assistance and organizational development services for arts and cultural organizations rooted in and serving historically underserved communities, to strengthen organizational capacity, community engagement, artist development, and long-term sustainability. **Grant funds are restricted to these activities and may not be used for general operating expenses**.

For the purpose of this program, a historically underserved community is defined as a community whose members are located within Pennsylvania and have historically been socially, culturally, or economically underserved. Underserved may be related to social, cultural, or economic circumstances or background, geographic isolation, lack of or difficulty accessing resources including but not limited to arts programming or funding, or other similar causes.

Program Features

Note: grant amounts are anticipated

Grant Categories and Anticipated Funding Amounts

1. **Seed Grant** for organizations and programs with revenue less than $100,000
   - Helps organizations incorporate or develop organizational structure, program, or revenue plans.
   - Up to $10,000/year for two years.
   - Non-matching, up front grant payments.
   - Applicants can be fiscally sponsored. Please see the addendum at the end of these guidelines for important information and additional requirements for fiscal sponsorships.
   - Organizations may receive a Seed Grant only once.

2. **Growth Grant** for organizations with revenue between $100,000 and $1,000,000
   - Helps organizations grow organizational structure, financial stability, or community engagement.
   - Up to $15,000/year for two years.
   - 25% up front grant payment and the remaining portion of the grant shall be a non-matching, reimbursement-based grant.
   - Organizations must have 501(c)(3) status.
   - Applicants cannot be fiscally sponsored.
   - Organizations may receive a Growth Grant only once.

3. **Milestone Grant** for organizations with revenue between $100,000 and $1,000,000
   - Helps organizations address significant operational or organizational milestones such as leadership succession, facilities expansion, relocation, or revenue plan.
   - Up to $50,000 over two years.
   - 25% up front grant payment and the remaining portion of the grant shall be a non-matching, reimbursement-based grant.

- Organizations must have 501(c)(3) status. Applicants cannot be fiscally sponsored.
- Organizations may receive a Milestone Grant only once.

For Non-Reimbursement Grants (Seed)

This is a non-reimbursement based grant, which means grantees will receive their grant before eligible expenses are incurred or paid. Grantee organizations are responsible for using grant funds only for eligible activities associated with the Seed Grant and must comply with all grant requirements, including reporting and documentation, as outlined in the grant agreement.

For Reimbursement Grants (Growth and Milestone):

These are primarily reimbursement-based grants, which means grantees must first incur and pay for eligible expenses, then submit an invoice/final report with required documentation, such as receipts, invoices, and proof of payment. Grantees may request an initial advance payment for up to 25% of the grant amount.

Use of Grant Funds (examples include but are not limited to):

- Obtaining 501(c)(3) tax exempt status.
- Strategic planning, organizational evaluation and assessment.
- Human resources-related initiatives (excluding routine staff salaries and benefits).
- Professional development, including conferences and workshops.
- Consultant services.
- Facilities (applicable only to Milestone Grant).

Funding Restrictions

Grant funds cannot be used for any of the following:

- Activities that occur outside the performance period.
- Activities that have a religious purpose.
- Payments to lobbyists.
- Cash prizes and awards.
- Benefit activities.
- Hospitality expenses (e.g., receptions).
- Except for the Milestone grant, capital expenditures, including equipment costing $500 per item or more.
- Operating expenses.
- Competitions.
- Performances and exhibitions not available to the public.

Other Information

- One application per organization, per year, may be submitted.
- Grantees may participate in specific capacity building workshops (virtual, in person and/or hybrid) offered by Pennsylvania Creative Industries.
- Grantees may participate in specific gatherings (virtual, in person and/or hybrid) offered by Pennsylvania Creative Industries.
- Grant awards may be subject to the National Endowment for the Arts' (a federal agency) General Terms and Conditions-Appendix A: GTC-PARTNERSHIP-FY25-PLUS-6-25-25-FINAL.pdf.

Applicant Eligibility

Applicant must:

- Be a non-profit, tax-exempt arts and culture organization whose mission is to create, perform, present, promote or serve the creative (arts) sector.
- Be located in Pennsylvania and registered as a Pennsylvania Non-profit Corporation with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations, and in compliance with required annual report filing(s).
- Fiscal sponsors may only be used in the Seed grant category (see below for requirements for groups applying through a fiscal sponsor).
- Have average annual revenue of less than $1,000,000, based on a two-year average demonstrated by the most recently filed form 990 of the U.S. Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service. If your 990 is a postcard or 990-N, you must submit a board/committee/leadership financial statement from the most recently completed **two** fiscal years.
    - The financial statement must detail revenue, including contributed and earned income and income realized from investments, as applicable, and expenses. In-kind is not included.

Ineligible:

- Arts programs of non-arts organizations.
- Colleges or universities and entities directly affiliated with them, such as university foundations, campus-based arts centers or museums, departments or academic units (e.g., theatre departments, music schools, etc.), student organizations, and others.
- Fiscally sponsored entities, except for Seed Grants.
- Pre-K-12 public, private, and parochial schools and programs, including all charter schools and affiliated booster organizations.
- Auxiliary support organization such as "friends of" or "booster" groups that raise funds on behalf of another entity.
- Local Governments including counties and municipalities.
- Libraries, including municipality, county, authority, and non-profit.

Fiscal Sponsorships

Please see the addendum at the end of these guidelines for important information and additional requirements for fiscal sponsorships.

Crediting Pennsylvania Creative Industries

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

Narrative, Required Attachments, Submission and Review Process

Narrative

- What is your organization's mission?
- Describe the historically underserved community your organization serves, including but not limited to the nature and size of the community and how it has been historically underserved.

- How is your organization rooted in this community, including but not limited to length of time engaged with the community and collaborations or partnerships you have with members of the community and other organizations that serve them?
- How do you serve this community, including but not limited to the types and quantities of programs, initiatives, or other services provided to the community?
- What are your goals for strengthening your organization's capacity and sustainability?
- How will this grant funding help your organization meet these capacity goals, better serve your community, and ensure long-term sustainability?
- How will you measure success in meeting your capacity goals?
- For Milestone applicants only:
    - Provide a detailed description of the significant operational or organizational milestone you plan to address with this tier of funding.
    - Describe your detailed plan to address this milestone (including timeline, staffing and other considerations).

Required Attachments

1. IRS Determination Letter confirming nonprofit 501(c) status.
    - For Seed grant applicants: if 501(c) status is not yet established, fiscal sponsor's IRS determination letter must be submitted.
2. Most recently submitted IRS Form 990 tax filing, including postcard 990 and 900-N forms.
    - If the 990 is a postcard, 990-N, or applicant is exempt from filing a 990, the applicant must also submit a board/committee/leadership approved financial statement from the most recently completed two fiscal years. The financial statement must detail revenue, including contributed and earned income and income realized from investments, as applicable, and expenses. In-kind is not included.
    - For Seed grant applicants: if applying through a fiscal sponsor, the fiscal sponsor must submit a 990 in addition to a board/committee/leadership approved financial statement.
3. A succinct list of arts and culture activities with dates from the last **two** years. List must show **two** years of activities.
4. Proposed project budget.
    - **Grant funds are restricted to these activities and may not be used for general operating expenses**.
    - Funds must be used for activities such as:
        - Strategic planning
        - Human resources initiatives (excluding routine staff salaries and benefits)
        - Professional development, including conferences and workshops
        - Organizational evaluation and assessment
        - Consultant fees directly related to capacity building activities
        - Facilities (applicable only to the Milestone grant)
5. For Seed Grant applicants applying through a fiscal sponsor, see Addendum at the end of these guidelines for fiscal sponsorship requirements.

Submission Process

1. Read this document thoroughly.
2. Read and comply with the checklist for applicants and grantees: grants management checklist for applicants and grantees as of 7.17.25.pdf
3. Register and apply through the Electronic Single Application (ESA): grants.pa.gov/Login.aspx.
    - Note: You must register for a Keystone Login in order to apply through grants.pa.gov: https://keystonelogin.pa.gov/Account/Register
4. Submit online through the ESA website.
5. Please note that ACH must be established to make grant payments. Please sign up for ACH grant payments if you have not already done so:

https://na1.documents.adobe.com/public/esignWidget?wid=CBFCIBAA3AAABLblqZhAemOgcNfZcKCihxArEGRGeX4UDnmkQ4IxmzZYzAIXBvJBYew_vPwufqC7NLB9aYqY%2a

6. Questions?
    - For questions, concerns, and issues with Keystone Login call: (877) 328-0995.
    - For technical and login questions, contact the Enterprise eGrants Customer Service Center: (833) 448-0647 or egrantshelp@pa.gov.
    - For questions about grant application content and required attachments, contact PA Creative Industries:
        - Ian Rosario: irosario@pa.gov or (717) 525-5548
        - Amy Gabriele: agabriele@pa.gov or (717) 525-5547

Review Process

- Staff will review all applications to verify eligibility.
- A review committee will assess applications based on the following criteria:
    - Relevant and demonstrable service to a historically underserved community.
    - Evidence that the organization is rooted in the defined community, including but not limited to length of time engaged with the community and collaborations or partnerships with members of the community and other organizations that serve them.
    - Reasonable, achievable, and measurable goals and plans that will meet the goals of the program through which the applicant will strengthen organizational capacity, community engagement, artist development, and long-term sustainability.
- Funding recommendations will be based on the following:
    - The Pathway Program's budget and total number of eligible applicants.
    - Review committee assessment.
    - Note: Each year, the Council reviews funding parameters and may consider factors such as geographic and county distribution, etc.
- Pennsylvania Creative Industries' governing Council has final authority in approving award decisions and amounts.
- Awards will be approved by Council at a publicly available Council meeting. Council meeting dates may be found here: https://www.pa.gov/agencies/coa/about/council-members/meetings.
- Applicants approved to receive awards will be sent email communication outlining the next steps in the grant process, including the reimbursement payment process.
- For Growth and Milestone grantees: Reimbursement materials/final reports are due no later than 30 days after the performance period closes according to the grant agreement (January 30, 2028 for most grantees).
- Grantees that fail to meet material terms and conditions of a grant award agreement, including but not limited to submission of a final report and reimbursement materials, may not be eligible for future PA Creative Industries grant awards.

Appeals Process

The Council recognizes that errors may occur in the application process. The Council is committed to acknowledging any errors and responding to rectify the effects of an error. The appeals process enables applicants to identify these errors and omissions and bring them to the attention of the Council. Appeals may result in a change in the determination of eligibility or the award amount if the applicant can satisfactorily document that an error or omission occurred through no fault of the applicant. Appeals are awarded only if the error or omission had a substantial effect on the evaluation of an application or on the determination of an applicant's eligibility.

Appeals are not intended to provide the applicant with an opportunity to challenge the qualitative assessment of the application. Missing the published application due date or failure to submit required information or documentation are not grounds for appeal.

Applicants considering an appeal should contact the applicable program director for advice and guidance. The appeal must be made in writing (hardcopy letter) to the Council's Chief of Staff within ten business days of the date of the notification of the award status from the Council. Appeal letters should identify the error or omission and the effect such error had on the Council's application review process. If the appeal is supported, funds will be awarded only if they are available.

Addendum

Fiscal Sponsorships

Unincorporated groups or nonprofit organizations that do not have tax exempt status must apply to Pennsylvania Creative Industries through a tax-exempt organization that serves as a fiscal sponsor.

Groups applying through a fiscal sponsor must meet the same requirements as other applicants, except for tax exempt status and being registered with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Corporations.

Fiscal Sponsors must be located in Pennsylvania and registered as a Pennsylvania Non-profit Corporation with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations, and in compliance with required annual report filing(s).

The fiscal sponsor is responsible for the administration of the grant award agreement (contract), including all reporting requirements. The fiscal sponsor receives the grant payment directly from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is responsible for ensuring full compliance.

Required Application Attachments for Fiscal Sponsors
If any of the following items are not submitted, the application will not be considered for funding:

1. IRS Determination Letter confirming nonprofit 501(c) status.
2. Most recently submitted IRS Form 990 tax filing.
3. Fully executed and active sponsorship agreement with the sponsored group. The agreement must include terms and conditions that address the following:
    - Financial management and oversight.
    - Administrative fees and services. **Note that use of grant funds to compensate a fiscal sponsor may not exceed 5% of the total grant award amount.**
    - Fundraising and donor relations, including who can solicit and accept donations.
    - Compliance and liability.
    - Termination and transition.
    - Communication and reporting protocols.
4. The fiscally sponsored group's board/committee/leadership approved financial statement for the most recently completed **two** fiscal years. The financial statement must detail revenue, including contributed and earned income and income realized from investments, as applicable, and expenses. In-kind contributions may not be included.
5. A succinct list of the sponsored group's arts activities with dates from the last **two** years. List must show **two** years of activities.

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 §301.32.