



Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

2027–2028 Application Guidelines Creative Communities Initiative

Application opens: September 1, 2026

Application closes: November 13, 2026, at 5 PM EST

Performance period: July 1 to June 30 each year

Table of Contents

- About Pennsylvania Creative Industries
- Creative Industries Defined
- Purpose of the Creative Communities Initiative
- What is creative placemaking/placekeeping?
- Program Goals
- Eligibility & Requirements
- Funding Amount
- Funding Restrictions
- Crediting Pennsylvania Creative Industries
- Application Process
- Application Content
- Application Review Process
- Review Criteria
- Appeals Process
- Questions?

About Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Creative Industries Defined

Creative industries encompass individuals, organizations, and businesses that generate goods, services, and intellectual property through creative work. This includes 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](#).

Purpose of the Creative Communities Initiative

The purpose of the Creative Communities program is to provide multi-year funding to community-driven, arts-based projects (creative placemaking/placekeeping) that serve as catalysts for livability, economic development, and community connectedness. Also called creative placemaking or placekeeping, the funded projects will have a demonstrated, positive impact on their respective communities.

What is creative placemaking/placekeeping?

Creative placemaking or placekeeping is a powerful community and economic development practice that integrates art, local creative sector assets, community culture and identity, and design to transform community spaces into vibrant, inclusive, accessible, and engaging places that foster community connectedness and livability.

If there is uncertainty about whether a project aligns with this Creative Communities Initiative the following questions may be a guide for reflection:

- Will the project transform or improve public space for the benefit of residents?
- Does the project foster community connectedness and belonging by engaging residents in planning and implementation?
- Are local artists, makers, and/or creative workers involved in shaping the project's vision and execution?
- Do the partner organizations have a demonstrated track record of successful collaboration and a shared vision and outcomes for the project?

Program Goals

- Strengthen communities through the arts and encourage creative expression and engagement to enhance community well-being.
- Promote and support projects that include and are accessible to all members of PA communities.
- Empower communities that have experienced underinvestment and support grassroots leaders and residents in addressing local challenges.
- Advance community revitalization and resilience and foster sustainable growth and adaptability.
- Cultivate deep community engagement and encourage active participation in community projects.
- Celebrate unique community identities that highlight what makes each community special.
- Build authentic partnerships through collaboration with local government and organizations, and artists and culture bearers.
- Invest in the creative sector through support of artists, creative small businesses, and cultural initiatives.
- Address community challenges positively by leveraging community assets to tackle pressing issues.

Eligibility & Requirements

- Project must be place-based.

- Required partnership of at least two organizations, one of which will serve as the lead applicant.
- Lead applicant must be a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation, or unit of government (counties, cities, boroughs, townships, and municipal authorities).
- Lead applicant organization must be located in the Pennsylvania community or county where the project will take place.
- Local government resolution and pledge of at least 10% of matching funds (cash or in-kind).

Please note: this funding opportunity is NOT designed to support established programs or ongoing operations and is not to be used as an annual source of funds.

Funding Amount

Generally, up to \$25,000 per year for up to four years.

- This is a reimbursement-based grant program, 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 to receive funding.

Funding Restrictions

- 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).
- Competitions.
- Performances and exhibitions not available to the public.
- Activities for which academic credit is given.

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.

Application Process

Please note: Applicants are no longer required to submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) in order to be invited to apply to the Creative Communities Initiative. Instead, please submit a complete application to ESA.

Application Content

1. Community Context

- Provide a brief but complete description of the community where the project will take place.
- Highlight key demographics, creative assets (artists/culture bearers), organizations, creative businesses) and social or economic dynamics that shape the project's relevance.

2. Opportunities and Challenges

- Clearly articulate the specific opportunities the project aims to leverage (e.g., untapped creative talent, underutilized public spaces, public safety, housing, community identity).
- Identify the challenges the project seeks to address (e.g., social isolation, lack of public spaces, underinvestment, community connectedness).
- Explain how these opportunities and challenges connect to the goals of your project.

3. Partnerships

- Describe the partners involved in the project and, if known, their roles.
- Highlight past collaborations among partners that demonstrate their ability to work together effectively.
- Emphasize how these partnerships strengthen the project's feasibility and impact.

4. Community Engagement

- Detail past inclusive engagement activities (e.g., events, workshops, listening sessions, surveys) that informed past or current project development.
- Outline planned engagement strategies to ensure the project remains responsive to community needs throughout its lifecycle.
- Explain how feedback from community members has shaped or will shape the project's vision and outcomes.

5. Role of Artists and Culture Bearers

- Describe how artists and culture bearers will be involved from planning through implementation.
- Explain their roles in shaping the project's creative direction, engaging the community, and ensuring cultural relevance.
- Highlight any innovative or experimental approaches to integrating their expertise.

Letters of Support

Three letters of support must be uploaded to the application and should be from key partners and stakeholders, such as local government, arts and culture organizations, planning or economic development agencies, the local tourism organization, education institutions, a Business Improvement District (BID), Chamber of Commerce, or other community organizations. Ensure the letters endorse the project's vision, feasibility, and potential impact while demonstrating each stakeholder's commitment to collaboration.

Application Review Process

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee of experts based on the criteria below, with considerations for geography and reach. The committee will evaluate each proposal's alignment with the program goals - community engagement, authentic inclusion of artists and culture bearers, and partnerships.

Committee recommendations will be presented to the Council, Pennsylvania Creative Industries' governing body. The Council will act on these recommendations and has final authority in the awarding of grants. Applicants will be notified about the status of their

proposals. Selected proposals will receive an email with next steps outlining the grant award process.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated in the following areas:

1. Community Engagement

- Depth and inclusivity of engagement efforts: How have the partners completed successful community engagement activities in the past, and what plans are in place to continue and expand community engagement for this project moving forward?
- Methods of engagement: Are multiple methods used (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, listening sessions, workshops) to ensure broad participation?
- Community ownership: Does the project reflect the priorities and voices of the community it aims to serve?
- Accessibility: Are engagement activities accessible to all (e.g., language accommodations, childcare, transportation support)?

2. Authentic Inclusion of Artists and Culture Bearers

- Role of artists and culture bearers: Are artists and culture bearers involved meaningfully in the project's planning, design, and implementation?
- Cultural relevance: Does the project center local creative assets, culture and/or traditions, or heritage in its approach?
- Compensation and support: Are artists and culture bearers fairly compensated for their time and contributions?

3. Partnerships

- Strength and diversity of partnerships: Does the project involve multiple partners (e.g., local government, nonprofits, businesses, community groups) working collaboratively?
- Past collaborations: Have partners worked together successfully in the past? Are there examples of shared goals and outcomes?
- Shared vision: Do partners have a unified vision for the project, and is this vision clearly articulated?
- Leverage of resources: Do partnerships bring additional resources (e.g., funding, in-kind support, expertise) to the project?

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 Sarah Merritt, Senior Director of Community Development: skmerritt@pa.gov or (717) 787-1521

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.

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.