



Pennsylvania  
**Creative Industries**  
Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

## 2025–2026 Application Guidelines for Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program

**Application opens:** Varied start, beginning November 1, 2025. Please contact [your regional PPA Partner organization](#) for the date specific to your region.

**Application closes:** No later than August 31, 2026. Please contact above referenced PPA Partner organizations for specific deadlines per region.

**Grant activity period:** January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026

**Grant amount:** \$2,000, in addition to business planning resources

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### Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) Program Description

Creative entrepreneurs are invaluable assets to communities. They lead innovation, deliver creative products and services, generate economic opportunity, and build community identity. This program is designed for creative entrepreneurs who aspire to start their own for-profit business or who operate an existing for-profit micro business. The program encourages the participation of interested creative entrepreneurs located in communities across the commonwealth, including those located in low-income communities, urban, suburban, and rural communities. Successful applicants receive small business consultation services and a grant of \$2,000.

Download the [Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program info sheet \(PDF\)](#)

### Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Have not received Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (funding in the past three years (Creative entrepreneurs are eligible to apply for the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator program once every three years).
  - Please note that applying and receiving funds after the three-year mark is contingent upon availability of funds after applicants who have never received funding have had an opportunity to be funded. Other requirements for reapplying after three years include a follow-up visit with a referral partner to review business plan and progress of business.
- Be at least 18 years of age and a current resident of Pennsylvania for at least one year.
- Demonstrate gross revenue of less than \$200,000 from the creative entrepreneur business.
- Be a creative entrepreneur intending to form a business or 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
- Possess all current and valid licenses, permits, leases, certifications, and registrations required to engage in the creative endeavor (e.g. tattoo, street performance) in the geographical location served by the entrepreneurship.
- The CEA grant is funded through a program that activates State Taxpayer Funding. For the purposes of tax reporting, the funds are not considered a “gift” and should be reported in tax filings. For further questions regarding filing, please visit the IRS website at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) or consult with a tax professional.
- A final report and evidence of eligible use of the CEA grant funding is required at the end of the contract term. Consult with your PPA Partner for more information on the process for final reporting. See also “Application Process” in these guidelines for more information.

### Eligible Uses of Fund

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.
- Offsets to regular business operating costs, including regular salary or wages.
- Hospitality, food, or beverages.
- Direct or indirect participation in a political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.
- Attempts to influence legislation.

### Application Process

This program is administered regionally by Pennsylvania Creative Industries’ [Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts \(PPA\)](#), in cooperation with a network of small business development organizations, including [the PA Small Business Development Centers](#). To learn more about the program in your county and participating referral coordinators, contact your regional [PPA Partner](#).

- Creative entrepreneurs will first receive consultation services from and business plan review by a local small business development organization (known as "referral coordinators" for the purposes of this program). Business consultation services will be provided at no cost to interested creative entrepreneurs. (See "Referral Process" below.)
- Referral coordinators can guide entrepreneurs with the processes and methods for starting a business, development of a sound business plan, and business growth and sustainability strategies.
- Once a referral coordinator has reviewed a creative entrepreneur's business plan, they will refer the creative entrepreneur to the regional PPA Partner organization.
- Upon receiving the referral, the PPA Partner will send application materials to the creative entrepreneur.
- After receiving an eligible and complete application, the PPA Partner will enter into an award agreement with the creative entrepreneur.
- The CEA program includes the use of a data and information resource called the [Impact Management System \(IMS\)/ Business Growth Ladder \(BGL\)](#). This tool gives the creative entrepreneur insights into their business growth. Entrepreneurs will receive a link from Bridgeway Capital where the Entrepreneur will self-report their information. Once the creative entrepreneur inputs their data into the IMS/BGL system then the PPA Partner will process a grant of \$2,000. (See "Referral Process" below.)
- At the end of the grant period, the creative entrepreneur must input and complete their final report data into the BGL system. In addition, receipt of eligible purchases must be shared with the PPA Partner at the end of the grant period. If information is not input into the BGL and/or receipt of eligible purchases are not shared, then the creative entrepreneur will not be allowed access to future Pennsylvania Creative Industries grant funding cycles.

## Referral Process

- Eligible entrepreneurs must engage a PPA Partner designated referral coordinator in at least one consultation regarding a business formation or development activity.
- The referral coordinator will confirm that the client has demonstrated appropriate business planning as defined by the program guidelines (see below).
- The referral coordinator must submit a completed referral form to the PPA Partner.
- Referral of a creative entrepreneur to a PPA Partner does not guarantee funding will be made; the PPA Partner will make determinations of eligibility and availability of funds.

For the purposes of the CEA program, "viable business plan" means evidence of planning directed at forming a for-profit business or pursuing sustainable growth opportunities for an existing for-profit business. Evidence of planning may take a variety of forms and may be assessed by the Referral Coordinators' existing methods of working with clients. Examples of appropriate planning include, but are not limited to:

- New business brief.
- Completed Business Model Canvases.
- Participation in business planning workshop.
- Streamlined pitch deck.
- Recorded business pitch presentation.
- Extensive business plan.

## About Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Pennsylvania Creative Industries, powered by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, is a state agency under the Office of the Governor. Pennsylvania Creative Industries' mission is to empower, connect, and amplify creatives and creative industries and their contributions to Pennsylvania's communities, economy, and workforce.

For more information about Pennsylvania Creative Industries, visit [pa.gov/arts](https://pa.gov/arts).

## About Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts

Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts (PPA) is a partnership between local organizations and Pennsylvania Creative Industries. [PPA Partners](#) re-grant Pennsylvania Creative Industries funds to support a variety of local and community arts activities.

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## How to Apply

- 1) **Read this document thoroughly.**
- 2) **Apply and submit your application online through the [PPA Partner organization](#) in your region.**

## Need help?

- For technical and login questions or questions about content and attachments, contact the applicable [PPA Partner organization](#) for your region.
- For general questions about the PPA partnership, contact [Amanda Lovell](#).