Minutes
Council Meeting
March 26, 2026
9:00 a.m.
Virtual Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS: Chair Cohen, Vice Chair Alaquiva, Mr. Astorino, Representative Ciresi, Ms. Goldberg, Ms. Gunderson, Representative Labs, Judge Morgan, Mr. Parks, Mr. Stull, Mr. Warfield

COUNCIL MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Senator Bartolotta, Senator Cappelletti, Ms. Vilayphonh

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Karl Blischke, Executive Director; Heather Doughty, Chief of Creative Sector Policy and Research Christopher Duerr, Program Manager, Grant Reimbursements & Events; Jamie Dunlap, Chief Strategy Officer; Amy Gabriele, Chief Financial Officer; Norah Johnson, Chief of Staff ; Laura Kline, Executive Assistant; Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce and Business Development; Sarah Merritt, Senior Director, Community Development; Seth Poppy, Senior Director, Innovation and Visibility; and Ian Rosario, Senior Director, Asset Development.

GUESTS PRESENT: Addie Abelson, Chief Counsel; Amber Sizemore, Chief Counsel, Aleks Martray, Executive Director, Big Picture Alliance, Ashe Prawl, Deputy Legislative Director, Senator Cappellitti's Office.

ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER: Karl Blischke welcomed those in attendance and informed them that the meeting would be recorded for the administrative purpose of minute taking. Mr. Blischke then turned the meeting over to Chair Cohen.

ROLL CALL:
Karl Blischke, Executive Director

Mr. Blischke called the roll. A quorum was established.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: Chair Cohen reminded the Council of the PCA's Conflict of Interest Policy.

ITEM 2: APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Public Comment on this Action Item:

Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Asked for clarification about Dana Payne's attendance at the December meeting.

Mr. Blischke stated the minutes should be corrected.

Jonathan Stein, thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Stated that in the minutes it appears that there are 30% administrative costs provided in a $1,00,000 contract to Bridgeway Capital, which he described as higher costs than other programs. He asked if there was discussion about the administrative costs not reflected in the minutes.

Mr. Blischke stated that the minutes reflected the discussion.

Chair Cohen asked Council to approve the corrected December 4, 2025, Council meeting minutes noting the correction that Dana Payne was not in attendance at the meeting.

Mr. Alaquiva made a motion to approve the corrected minutes. Judge Morgan seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 3: Presentation on Pennsylvania's First, Registered Statewide Apprenticeship in the Creative Industries
Aleks Martray, Executive Director, Big Picture Alliance

Aleks Martray delivered a presentation to Council outlining the background and impact of Big Picture Alliance's Statewide Apprenticeship program. He also shared a video that highlighted one of the program's apprentices.

ITEMS 4: Recommendations for Catalysts Grants
Jamie Dunlap, Chief Strategy Officer

Ms. Dunlap provided some background information about the Catalysts Grant program and then provided an overview of the below listed Creative Catalyst Grants, which totaled $98,166.

Applicant: Pennsylvania State University **Proposal:** The Humanities in the Real World: A Video Storytelling Approach

Ms. Dunlap reported that Penn State University's proposed project is a community engagement initiative led by Humanities Works at Penn State Greater Allegheny. Ms. Dunlap explained that this project will include the production of a 30-minute public broadcast documentary highlighting the real-world impact of humanities and liberal arts disciplines. She stated that it showcases connections between fields (arts, philosophy, English, communications, etc.) and successful individuals/organizations, emphasizing diversity in representation and thought.

Dunlap reported that this project will also include a professionally managed integrated marketing communications campaign using social media, traditional media, and on-air promotion and will also include a collaboration with three Pennsylvania PBS affiliates for promotion, distribution, and premiere screenings. Ms. Dunlap stated that an initial public premier is planned in Pittsburgh, State College, and Harrisburg. She stated that the project will also include the development and distribution of digital and print educational resources for educators, students, parents, and the general public.

Request: $10,000 **Recommendation: $10,000**

Applicant: FringeArts **Proposal:** Building Professional Development Opportunities for Fringe Festival Artists Across PA

Ms. Dunlap reported that FringeArts piloted free professional workshops in 2025 for artists and creatives in partnership with Philadelphia Scenic Works and ArtistsU, receiving strong positive feedback. Dunlap stated that building on this success, the organization plans to expand access to no-cost resources across Pennsylvania by collaborating with other fringe festivals, including

Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, to create shared learning opportunities and strengthen artist communities. She indicated that key activities include touring a workshop on sustainable artistic careers, conducting cross-festival visits to assess artist needs, and producing recorded workshop content for statewide access.

Request: $18,175.50 **Recommendation: $18,175.50**

Applicant:	Lancaster Fringe Festival	**Proposal:**	Lancaster Fringe Festival

Ms. Dunlap reported that Lancaster Fringe Festival is a newly formed nonprofit planning a four-day inaugural festival in downtown Lancaster, Pennsylvania, from May 21–24, 2026, with a mission to bring together artists to share work in theater, music, and visual art that emphasizes human connection. She explained that the festival will feature approximately 40 performances across 20 venues, along with street performances designed to activate public spaces and support local galleries and nightlife. Dunlap stated that the intention is that this will be an annual event and added that the festival plans to expand citywide in future years to increase access to the arts, with an affordable $10 bracelet granting entry to all performances. Ms. Dunlap stated that promotion will be supported through partnerships with Discover Lancaster and the city's Tourism Office.

Request: $7,491 **Recommendation: $7,491**

Applicant:	Kareem's Mission	**Proposal:**	Kareem's Mission Autism Inclusion Art Gallery

Ms. Dunlap reported that Kareem's Mission is launching a public autism inclusion art exhibit to elevate youth artists on the autism spectrum through a professionally curated and widely accessible showcase with statewide reach. She explained that the exhibition will feature artists ages 3 to 21, with submissions accepted nationwide, and will debut at the Kareem's Mission Center at Central Penn College from April 1–11, 2026, concluding with a public luncheon that brings together artists, families, community members, and local officials, along with planned media coverage. Dunlap stated that additional exhibition sites will include regional colleges, schools, and community locations to expand access and visibility and added that artwork will be professionally presented alongside pieces from established artists, with detailed artist information and accessible design standards. Ms. Dunlap stated that beyond the exhibition itself, the project is designed to build confidence, social skills, and a sense of accomplishment among participants by providing meaningful opportunities for public recognition and engagement.

Request: $10,000 **Recommendation: $10,000**

Applicant:	Center For Energy and Computer Education Excellence	**Proposal:**	Steel City Urban Block Party

Ms. Dunlap reported that the Steel City Urban Block Party is a free public arts and performance festival scheduled for April 25, 2026, outside the Petersen Events Center in Oakland as part of the broader Steel City Draft weekend. She explained that this festival will serve as a central event within a multi-day lineup and will feature artists and performers from across Pennsylvania, along with a curated marketplace supporting creative entrepreneurs through professional presentation and direct audience engagement. Dunlap added that a key component includes a competitive showcase on April 24 at Avalon Social, where selected performers will advance to perform at a high-profile concert the following day. She stated that funding will also support additional Draft weekend events requiring paid creative and production roles and explained that by activating areas beyond the main NFL Draft footprint, the initiative aims to expand economic opportunities, increase local spending, and highlight Pennsylvania's creative workforce during a nationally visible event.

Request: $10,000 **Recommendation: $10,000**

Applicant: ArtPhilly **Proposal:** What Now: 2026

Ms. Dunlap reported that ArtPhilly will present *What Now: 2026*, a citywide multidisciplinary arts festival running from late May through July 4, 2026, in conjunction with the nation's 250th anniversary. She stated that this festival will feature more than 30 original works across music, dance, theater, visual arts, film, and storytelling, created in partnership with over 40 institutions and spanning neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia. Dunlap added that programming will include major collaborations and new works by prominent artists and organizations, all centered on exploring the nation's past, present, and future through a civic and cultural lens. Ms. Dunlap stated that this initiative aims to position Philadelphia as a leading arts destination, foster community pride, increase engagement with local arts organizations—particularly in neighborhoods—and generate economic impact across the city and region.

Request: $10,000 **Recommendation: $10,000**

Applicant: Center For Metal Arts Inc. **Proposal:** Center for Metal Arts' Passport Program Promotion

Ms. Dunlap reported that the Center for Metal Arts, a nonprofit forging school located at the historic Cambria Iron and Steel site in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, is advancing its mission of preserving and teaching traditional forging through hands-on educational programming. She stated that the organization is launching the Passport Program, a 12-month intensive training and professional development initiative for emerging blacksmiths and metalworkers, designed to build technical skills and support sustainable career pathways. Dunlap explained that in order to expand awareness and participation, CMA plans a statewide "road show" featuring public demonstrations and outreach events, highlighting Pennsylvania's leadership in preserving industrial heritage. She stated that these activities will include demonstrations in western, eastern, and central Pennsylvania, as well as promotion at the Cambria Iron Conference and added that the initiative aims to increase public engagement, strengthen the program's reach, and position Pennsylvania as a center for creativity and industrial arts, with participants ultimately presenting their work at a future conference.

Request: $12,500 **Recommendation: $12,500**

Applicant: RealTime Interventions RealTime Arts **Proposal:** Healthy Stories SWPA

Ms. Dunlap reported that RealTime Arts, in partnership with Allegheny Health Network, will launch the Equitable Dinners community theatre initiative in Pennsylvania in 2026, using a nationally recognized model that combines short performances, shared meals, and facilitated discussions to engage communities around critical social issues. She stated that beginning in Pittsburgh in July 2026, the program will feature a pilot series of small-scale performances followed by a larger public event, centered on the theme "We Hold These Truths-A Seat at the Table," exploring identity, access, and health as they relate to food. Dunlap explained that original plays will be developed from community listening sessions conducted with support from health partners, with opportunities for stakeholder feedback to ensure authenticity. She added that based on evaluation results, the program will expand in fall/winter with additional performances across Southwest Pennsylvania, continuing to use arts-based dialogue to address community-identified topics.

Request: $10,000 **Recommendation: $10,000**

Applicant: Art-Reach Inc. **Proposal:** Leadership Exchange for Art and Disability (LEAD) Conference

Ms. Dunlap reported that Art-Reach is the local host organization for the Leadership Exchange for Art and Disability (LEAD) conference that will be in Philadelphia August 11-14, 2026. She explained that funds raised by the local host will go toward scholarships for the local community, support peripheral events, and drive interest into the local creative sector.

Dunlap stated that Art-Reach is planning an evening celebration for conference attendees at a local venue that will highlight arts access and celebrate Art-Reach's 40th anniversary and added that Art-Reach will provide its Art-Reach ACCESS Card to all 700 attendees of the conference so that they can experience the local creative venues that make Philadelphia's cultural scene vibrant and exciting.

Ms. Dunlap explained that during the conference, 700 creative professionals working to make the arts in their institutions more accessible to people with disabilities will converge on Philadelphia.

Dunlap stated that Art-Reach plans to cover conference registration for 140 local arts professionals in SE Pennsylvania and added that over three days, conference attendees will learn about arts access during dozens of concurrent sessions hosted at the Marriott Downtown. She indicated that conference attendees will also have the chance to venture out into Philadelphia's neighborhoods to visit cultural organizations that offer $2 admission to over 102 cultural sites.

Request: $10,000 **Recommendation: $10,000**

Ms. Dunlap noted that all applicants discussed today—along with those previously approved—are contributing funds on a one-to-one matching basis to support these new initiatives.

Public Comment on this Action Item:

1. Patrick Fisher, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council: Raised concerns about a previously approved AI-generated art contest, noting significant apprehension among artists in Southwestern Pennsylvania about AI's role in creative work. He urged the State Arts Council to conduct a statewide survey and establish a clear, transparent policy on AI-generated art.

Mr. Fisher also commented on the Steel City Draft urban block party, expressing general support for regional arts events but concern over ticket prices ($85-$150). He emphasized the importance of ensuring accessibility for Pittsburgh residents, particularly given the event's $10,000 in state funding.

2. Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Expressed appreciation for the Creative Catalyst program's focus on building pathways into artistic careers and expanding individual access to the arts. However, he questioned the lack of parallel investment in the broader arts ecosystem, emphasizing that access to arts and arts education should be systemic—not program-dependent—and integrated into public education so participation becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation as presented in the Council meeting materials.

Judge Morgan made a motion to approve the recommendations. Mr. Parks seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 5: Recommendations for Catalysts Grants Guidelines
Seth Poppy, Senior Director, Innovation and Visibility

Seth Poppy reported that Agency staff recommends approval of the 2026-2027 Creative Catalyst Program Guidelines, which have been refined to improve clarity, consistency, and alignment with Pennsylvania Creative Industries' priorities, while maintaining the existing application process, eligibility, and match requirements. Key updates include a restriction on duplicate funding to prevent overlap with other state grants, a maximum award of $25,000 to broaden resource distribution, revision of the assessment criteria to allow for strong regional initiatives, and clarification that the program is reimbursement-based, requiring grantees to pay expenses before submitting documentation for reimbursement. These changes enhance transparency, strengthen program administration, and reinforce the intended statewide impact of Creative Catalyst investments.

Ms. Goldberg asked for clarification on the term "any size" for these organizations. Mr. Poppy explained that, unlike the Creative Asset program, the Creative Catalyst program has no size requirement, making both small and large organizations eligible. He noted that eligibility guidelines specify applicants must be a nonprofit, government entity, college or university, or school district providing creative sector programming or services in Pennsylvania, and he offered examples.

Public Comment for this Action Item:

1. Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Noted that the reimbursement model creates a significant barrier for smaller organizations without upfront capital, effectively limiting their access despite eligibility. He also raised concerns about ineligibility for fiscally sponsored projects, emphasizing that many grassroots arts initiatives—particularly in Philadelphia—begin and grow under fiscal sponsorship. He stated that these policies create structural barriers and asked that this concern be reflected in the record. Eric Cesar Morales noted that fiscally sponsored projects are largely used by people of color who already face greater barriers to capital and

nonprofit formation, so removing them would create additional structural obstacles for underserved communities and undermine the arts council's mission.

2. Terry Fox, thiNKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Stated that one of the cited grants involved a fiscally sponsored organization and asked for an example of how policy work fosters relevance.

   Mr. Blischke responded that policy efforts support artist development and the broader creative sector by informing practices—such as expanding access to the arts and creating career pathways for youth—and by using research to guide state and local decision-making toward a stronger arts ecosystem.

3. Jonathan Stein, thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Expressed concern that excluding fiscally sponsored applicants creates a barrier for small organizations, noting that fiscal sponsorship is a widely used, cost-effective model that avoids the expense of formal incorporation. He argued that disqualifying these groups is unsound policy and disproportionately impacts grassroots organizations, urging the Council to reconsider this restriction. He also questioned the 20% cap on administrative costs, citing an example of a higher allowance elsewhere, and requested a review of both policies.

4. Morgan Kasprowicz, Board Member Creative Pennsylvania: Cited a 2023 Social Impact Commons study noting that fiscal sponsorship is an equity and access issue, as organizations led by people of color are significantly more likely to rely on fiscal sponsorship to access grant funding.

5. Stephanie Lerner, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance: Spoke on behalf of Patricia Aden, noting that about 20% of Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's Creative Sector Flex Fund grantees are fiscally sponsored and emphasized that fiscal sponsorship is a common, important part of the grant ecosystem, especially for small organizations.

Mr. Blischke said he appreciates the public comment on fiscal sponsorship and it will be noted. He explained that the Agency evaluates organizations of all sizes based on their ability to responsibly manage state funds, carry out projects, and use the Commonwealth's reimbursement-based payment system.

Mr. Blischke addressed questions about administrative expenses in the Creative Entrepreneur program, explaining they cover direct programming such as convening and training cohorts of artists and entrepreneurs in Pennsylvania over an extended period.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation as presented in the Council meeting materials.

Mr. Parks made a motion to approve the recommendation. Judge Morgan seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 6: Recommendation for Creative Districts
Sarah Merritt, Senior Director, Community Development

Ms. Merritt reported that she previously provided an overview of the program at the October 2025 Council meeting, including its development and role in supporting community economic development. She noted the program is designed to give communities immediate access to resources to support the Creative Districts designation process, with a list of resources outlined on page 40 of the Council Book to be released at launch.

Ms. Merritt also reviewed the program requirements, stating it is based on strategic planning, community input, and national best practices to expand community development, elevate local creative assets, and integrate arts and culture into long-term planning. Merritt explained that eligibility is limited to Pennsylvania-based 501(c)(3), 501(c)(6) organizations, or local government units serving as District Coordinating Organizations, with a required 1:1 match including local government participation. She stated that grants of up to $50,000 annually for five years are anticipated, with key dates including a Letter of Intent due June 1, 2026, applications due January 15, 2027, followed by site visits, panel review, and anticipated Council approval in July 2027.

Ms. Merritt provided examples of opportunities for collaboration with other state agencies and provided a list of key dates relative to this program.

Ms. Merritt requested Council approval of the guidelines as presented in the Council material and to begin statewide promotion and community outreach for the program.

Public Comments for this Action Item:

1. Jonathan Stein, thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Characterized the initiative as an economic and community development effort and questioned why the Arts Council is using limited arts funding for this work instead of agencies like DCED, which receives significant state funding, and the Department of Labor and Industry, which also handles economic development. He asked for the legislative directive authorizing this use of the appropriation for community and economic development activities rather than direct support to artists and arts organizations.

Mr. Blischke thanked Mr. Stein for his comment and emphasized that the creative sector is both a cultural asset and an economic and community development driver that all go together and cannot be separated. He clarified that all Council-approved grants—whether for asset, community, or workforce development—are fundamentally arts investments.

2. Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Noted that the Creative District designation requirements—such as infrastructure, planning capacity, and existing activity—favor already well-resourced organizations. He asked how the Council will support underserved and under-resourced communities, particularly rural areas and communities of color, and referenced the former Preserving Diverse Cultures Division as a resource that could have helped build such capacity. He questioned whether the program, as structured, aligns with the Council's mandate.

Chair Cohen stated that each of the grant proposals have been extremely well researched and will serve the community and those individuals within the community.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation as presented in the Council meeting materials.

Mr. Parks made a motion to approve the recommendation. Judge Morgan seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 7: Recommendation for Statewide Services - Recommendation for Administration of Public-Private Partnership Projects
Sarah Merritt, Senior Director, Community Development

Ms. Merritt stated that in 2025, Pennsylvania Creative Industries partnered with PECO and Team Pennsylvania to administer the Powering the Arts grant program to expand audience access to arts and cultural experiences in the counties in and surrounding Philadelphia. Merritt stated that 139 applications were received and 30 grants of up to $5,000 each were awarded after a competitive review, and many were awarded to smaller, grass-roots organizations. Merritt explained that the initiative served as a pilot for public-private collaboration, providing insights into how state agencies, nonprofits, and corporate partners can work together to strengthen the creative sector.

Ms. Merritt stated that Agency staff requests Council approval of $25,000 for the Team Pennsylvania Foundation to administer the 2026 program, leveraging its statewide convening role and experience in economic development to support cross-sector partnerships and advance the strategic plan's goals.

Public Comments for this Action Item:

1. Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Asked how the council will ensure partnerships expand funding and access, rather than adding an administrative layer. He stated that there is less money going into funding after PCA involvement and added more administrative hurdles. He stated that the program went from being a full grant to having to have a 1:1 match and from being $10,000 to $5,000. He also said it went from giving $190,000 to $150,000, and that when Mr. Blischke stated that this was introducing new money, it is categorically wrong and this needs to be recorded in the notes.

Chair Cohen stated that public private partnerships are wonderful additional funding that goes to the creative sector and to individuals.

Mr. Blischke stated that this is about introducing private sector funding and coordinating additional funds for the arts.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation as presented in the Council meeting materials.

Mr. Warfield made a motion to approve the recommendation. Ms. Goldberg seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 8: Planned Updates to the 26-27 Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program
Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce & Business Development

Ms. Lovell presented an informational memo outlining plans for the FY 2026-27 Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) grant cycle. She noted the program is entering its seventh cycle with strategic updates to better serve established creative entrepreneurs and will continue providing funding and resources to for-profit businesses across Pennsylvania. The program is being revamped in collaboration with the statewide administrator, Bridgeway Capital.

Ms. Lovell explained that the Council-approved $300,000 administrative budget will support statewide in-person and virtual cohort meetings, enabling networking and resource access. She stated that a new website will streamline applications and connect participants to statewide resources. Lovell reported that Bridgeway Capital will also manage program data collection using IMS and BGL systems, as outlined in the RFP.

Ms. Lovell reported that, beginning in FY 2026-27, the program will prioritize funding for businesses beyond the startup phase, with a focus on economic impact and sustainability. She stated that cohort offerings, business planning, and resources will be tailored to participants' growth stages and added that past and new applicants will be eligible.

Ms. Lovell announced the new grant cycle will launch May 15, 2026, at FDP Studio Shop in Pleasant Unity. She noted the program will shift toward supporting mid-stage businesses, which were previously underserved, rather than primarily early-stage ventures. Lovell explained that these businesses often have physical and online operations and some include micro-manufacturing.

Ms. Lovell stated that this shift is informed by 3.5 years of program data and through this fiscal year, the program will have invested approximately $3.5 million in nearly 1,600 grantees, with about 75% of funding supporting early-stage businesses. Lovell added that approximately 42% of current participants may be eligible to reapply under the new model.

Ms. Lovell emphasized that while the initial program focused on startup support and visibility, the new iteration will prioritize sustainability, growth, and larger, more targeted investments. She also noted that stakeholder feedback, including focus groups hosted by Bridgeway Capital, helped shape these updates. Lovell stated that past grantees who meet requirements, as well as new applicants, are encouraged to apply, with expanded outreach planned statewide.

Public Comments for this Information Item:

1. Patrick Fisher (Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council): Stated that creative entrepreneurs are those building market-driven enterprises focused on revenue, growth, and demand. While valid, he noted this represents only a narrow segment of Pennsylvania's arts ecosystem. He emphasized that many artists—such as muralists, playwrights, teaching artists, and composers—engage in civic, educational, and cultural work not driven by market forces or revenue goals.

   Fisher added that this aligns with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts' founding mandate under Act 538 (1965), which emphasizes supporting arts as vital to community, culture, and education, with economic impact as a secondary benefit. He cautioned that prioritizing economic metrics shifts support to scalable, revenue-generating ventures, leaving non-commercial artists underserved.

2. Gwendolyn Bye, Dancefusion: Asked if the CEA program is for artists that are for-profit. She said she is confused because she thought this is all about the arts. She asked if this program is for any kind of entrepreneur with any kind of business or if it must be an art related business.

Mr. Blischke clarified that the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program is limited to artists and creative entrepreneurs, not general business owners. He noted that artists often work across nonprofit, for-profit, and public sectors, navigating multiple roles. Some seek to leverage their creative practice for economic opportunity, and Council recognizes all of this as part of a unified creative sector that benefits Pennsylvania.

He emphasized that nonprofits remain a priority and are a critical part of the arts ecosystem, supported through various grants. He underscored the importance of recognizing the diverse ways artists and creative entrepreneurs work.

3. Terry Fox, thiNKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Commented about the redefinition of artists as creative entrepreneurs or a parity with them. Said it was disheartening to hear about this program. Ms. Fox asked Ms. Lovell to provide an example of an artist centered, artistic based support from this program.

Amanda Lovell shared numerous examples of artist-led businesses supported by the program. These include former Folk & Traditional Arts apprentices and a painter from Erie who was an Arts in Education instructor and transitioned to full-time studio work after receiving a Creative Business Loan Fund award. Lovell noted the program supports a wide range of fields (e.g., dance studios, jewelry, web design, fashion, photography, fine arts) and serves both for-profit and nonprofit grantees. Lovell added that recipients, including a gallery owner she recently met, describe the funding as a game changer.

4. Jonathan Stein, thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Said he appreciated the strong back-and-forth and hopes it continues, noting it was lacking in past meetings. He pointed out that participants in the entrepreneurial program were affiliated with Folk & Traditional Arts, despite the end of that program and Arts in Education, which he said nurture artists' development. He also raised concerns about costs: the $300,000 in administrative fees to Bridgeway Capital (noted in the December 2025 Council Meeting minutes, p. 10) is separate from the $700,000 re-granted, and he thinks this overhead unusually high. He questioned whether hiring staff could have been more cost-effective and called the contract excessive. Finally, he said funding a for-profit business is highly unusual and noted a state legislator he spoke with was surprised by this practice.

5. Stephanie Lerner, Greater Philadelphia Arts & Culture Alliance: Echoed concerns about limiting individual funding to economic-focused programs. She stated that because of the end of Arts in Education and Folk & Traditional Arts, the CEA program may be the only option, narrowing support for artists. She also raised concerns about Bridgeway Capital's western PA focus, emphasizing the need to reflect statewide differences, including southeastern PA and rural needs. While she supports creative entrepreneurs, she advocated for a "yes and" approach with more direct support for individual artists beyond economic priorities.

ITEM 9: Proposed Updates to the Eligibility for Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program
Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce & Business Development

Ms. Lovell reported that this action item is regarding updates to the current eligibility for the evolution of the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program which will go into effect with the September 2026 cycle. Ms. Lovell noted that Council has already approved other eligibility requirements that are not listed in this member but have been in action since the beginning of the CEA program six cycles ago.

Lovell reported that in addition to those eligibility requirements, Agency staff recommends to Council, the following added eligibility requirements: entrepreneur applicants must be able to provide tax documentation verification that they have been operating a for-profit business for at least one year, in the form of a sole proprietorship, LLC, partnership, or corporation. Lovell stated that creative entrepreneurs are defined as businesses that design and produce original or artistic crafted output in the form of products or services. She noted that employees of a creative business applicant are not eligible to apply or participate in the CEA program on behalf of their employer. Ms. Lovell stated that eligible focus areas include marketing, architecture, visual arts and crafts, design, film and media, digital games, music and entertainment, and publishing.

Ms. Lovell stated that two funding tiers are established with the new iteration of the program: Growth Grants for businesses with $10,000–$2,000,000 in revenue and Impact Grants for businesses with $50,000–$2,000,000 in revenue. Ms. Lovell explained that previous CEA grantees may apply under the revised criteria, with a three-year ineligibility period for repeat funding in the same tier following award.

Public Comments for this Action Item:

1. Jonathan Stein, thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Argued the entrepreneurial program reflects a broader mission shift under current leadership, expanding "creative industries" in a way that dilutes support for traditional arts. He questioned using public arts funding for for-profit sectors like marketing and advertising, noting that $1 million is being directed to these areas while programs such as Arts in Education, Preserving Diverse Cultures, the Flex Fund, and Folk & Traditional Arts were cut. He called this a significant and unprecedented shift in legislative intent and urged the Council to openly debate it.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation as presented in the Council meeting materials.

Mr. Parks made a motion to approve the recommendation. Mr. Warfield seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 10: Proposed Grants Program for Smaller Organizations and Programs
Amy Gabriele, Chief Financial Officer

Ms. Gabriele requested Council authorization to develop and launch a new grants program in Fall 2026 to support small creative arts organizations and programs, as part of the agency's strategic plan implementation. She stated that the program will run on a January–December performance period and be administered by experienced agency staff in compliance with Commonwealth policies.

Gabriele indicated that full guidelines will be presented in July 2026 and explained that the program will support organizations with revenues between $10,000–$100,000, with grants averaging approximately $4,000. She added that funding will be reimbursement-based per Management Directive 305.20, which is the Commonwealth's Office of the Budget's preferred and ideal way to grant taxpayer funded grant programs. Ms. Gabriele reported that eligibility will be similar to the Creative Assets program, with applicants required to be Pennsylvania-based nonprofits or arts-focused programs with at least two years of consistent programming. Ineligible entities include colleges/universities, fiscally sponsored entities, K–12 schools, and auxiliary organizations.

AGENDA

Ms. Gabriele reported that the program will provide flexible funding statewide, including rural areas, and is expected to make over 200 organizations eligible. She stated that most Creative Sector Flex Fund and Strategies for Success grantees will also be eligible.

Representative Ciresi noted concerns about reduced access to small grants and requested examples of eligible organizations. He clarified that state funding to for-profit entities occurs broadly across the Commonwealth $60 million budget. Representative Ciresi also stated that the current programs that are being offered by the Agency do not receive enough funding and expressed support for increased arts funding and continued advocacy.

Ms. Gabriele confirmed eligibility estimates and cited examples of eligible entities.

Mr. Parks thanked the public for participating and highlighted the growth of Pennsylvania's arts sector from fewer than 2,600 organizations in 2004 to more than 5,400 today. He noted that state arts funding declined from $15 million in FY 2006-2007 to $9.5 million following the 2008 budget crisis and has remained static since. Mr. Parks outlined the Council's shift since 2018 toward broader impact strategies and partnerships to maximize limited public funding. He cited the partnership with the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to create murals at Turnpike service plazas as an example of leveraging outside funding. Mr. Parks emphasized that corporate and foundation contributions account for the largest share of arts funding nationally and stated that the Council continues to use state funding as seed money to expand opportunities for artists, creatives, and communities across the Commonwealth.

Public Comments for this Action Item:

1. Patrick Fisher, CEO, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council: Thanked Ms. Gabriele for providing examples of organizations under $100,000 eligible for this program. Mr. Fisher asked to be able to make one correction, Art All Night, in Pittsburgh, would be ineligible for future funding because they do utilize a fiscal sponsor, which is their local CDCs. He also stated that some of the examples that were given do use fiscal sponsors, which goes back to the importance of fiscal sponsorships.

2. Sharon Zook, President, Lebanon Valley Council on the Arts: Stated that the organization has operated for 50 years and maintained a downtown storefront arts center for the past 20 years, serving a county population of 140,000. She noted the organization's role in economic development in the City of Lebanon and explained that a state-funded feasibility study supported development of the arts center. Zook stated that the organization is "asset rich and cash poor" due to property ownership and support of entrepreneurs renting space in the facility. She emphasized the continued need for state funding to serve the county and thanked Council for considering organizations in the $10,000-$100,000 funding range.

3. Stephanie Lerner, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance: Thanked Council and staff for developing a program that supports small organizations. She advocated for increased overall funding for the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and for a greater share of grant funding to go to small organizations. Lerner emphasized the importance of fiscally sponsored organizations, noting that 20% of the 80 organizations funded through her organization are fiscally sponsored. While supporting compliance with state contracting and grant requirements, she encouraged exploration of alternative fiscal mechanisms to

allow funding access for fiscally sponsored groups, similar to previous partnership programs.

4. Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Stated that his organization likely would not have existed under the proposed program structure. He explained that the organization was created during the pandemic after Dana Payne identified barriers faced by Latino applicants to Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grants due to language and systemic challenges. Morales stated that the organization began as a fiscally sponsored project and, through the Strategies for Success program, received multi-year funding, technical assistance, and support that enabled it to become an independent nonprofit. He expressed concern that the proposed grant program removes pathways that helped emerging organizations develop, citing lower reimbursement amounts, lack of technical assistance, and increased structural barriers. Morales stated that the proposed changes appear to favor organizations with existing resources and questioned whether that aligns with the mission of the Arts Council.

Chair Cohen commented that Council's mission is to be well rounded and balanced through all of the 67 counties in Commonwealth.

5. Jonathan Stein of thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Expressed concerns that the proposed program creates barriers for small arts organizations by excluding fiscally sponsored groups and requiring reimbursement-based grants. He noted that many small organizations lack the financial capacity to front grant expenses and stated that fiscal sponsorship is widely accepted nationally. Mr. Stein also questioned the reduction of funding from the former $1.5 million Flex Fund to the proposed $1 million allocation and urged revisions before implementation.

6. Mia Kang, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Folklore Project: Expressed appreciation for the focus on supporting small organizations but raised concerns about excluding fiscally sponsored organizations and eliminating technical assistance support. She emphasized the importance of outreach, application assistance, interpretation services, and capacity-building efforts provided through existing partnerships and urged Council to delay approval pending further discussion with organizations working directly with artists and small groups statewide.

Mr. Blischke clarified that the proposed $1 million program is intended for organizations with budgets between $10,000 and $100,000, while the Asset Program will support organizations above $100,000. He stated that, combined, the two programs are intended to provide support comparable to the former Flex Fund and do not represent a reduction in support for small organizations.

7. Dr. Monica Fitchell, Advocacy Chair for Pennsylvania Dance Education: Expressed concerns about reductions to Arts in Education residency grants, stating that the grants have provided critical workforce development opportunities for dance artists and educational access for K-12 students. She noted that the grants support career pathways for dance educators and artists and emphasized the importance of continued investment in arts education to sustain Pennsylvania's creative workforce and economic impact.

Chair Cohen requested that Council vote on the action item as presented, with the addition that staff review the fiscal sponsorship issue and return with recommendations at the July meeting.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation as presented in the Council meeting materials.

This motion was tabled.

ITEM 11: Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Draft Budget
Amy Gabriele, Chief of Finance & Administration

Ms. Gabriele reported that this memo in the Council Book represents the draft Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget, which will be acted upon at the July 2026 Council meeting. Ms. Gabriele stated that the Governor submitted a proposed state budget in February which included $9.59 million grants budget. Ms. Gabriele explained that there is a shift in the proposed FY26-27 budget presentation to reflect the new strategic plan and programs within it. Ms. Gabriele stated that waiver balances from previous years will be submitted for approval by the Governor's Office of Budget, which typically occurs in August. Ms. Gabriele stated that the draft budget has been reorganized to align with the new strategic plan, with funding presented by the plan's five key areas and descriptions provided for each program explaining the proposed use of funds.

ITEM 12: Chair's Report
Susan Cohen, Chair

Chair Cohen thanked Agency staff and Council for their continued work on the new direction, which has been a long 12-month process of research, discussion and outreach. Cohen stated that she listened to the audience and thanked them for their comments. Chair Cohen emphasized that the agency is dedicated to serving all of Pennsylvania with the goal of being equitable and well balanced.

Chair Cohen provided information about projects to commemorate American 250 and described work being done with educators to create a piece of art representing all 67 counties. Chair Cohen hopes there will be a large mural or screen unveiled by the First Lady in Harrisburg.

Chair Cohen provided an update on the PA Crafts initiative which was funded by a Creative Catalyst grant and stated that there will be a public event on April 10th in Pittsburgh. Cohen explained that this event will highlight how Contemporary Craft, the Union Project, and the Pittsburgh Glass Center will lead Pittsburgh is Craft. Cohen stated this event is open to the public and all present are encouraged to attend.

Chair Cohen congratulated Vice Chair Emmai Alaquiva for the documentary he directed, Ebony Canal. Cohen explained that this documentary was narrated by actress Viola Davis and was nominated for an NCAA Image award for Outstanding Short Form Documentary. Cohen stated that this documentary explores systematic factors that contribute to black maternal mortality. Chair Cohen also mentioned that the documentary received the 2025 Cultural Visionary Award from the Urban World Film Festival.

Chair Cohen reported that she and Agency staff recently attended the ImagineX: Where Curiosity Becomes a Career - Creative Industry Careers Conference in Scranton. Cohen explained that this participatory conference introduced young people to professions in creativity and innovation and that over 300 students participated and were able to learn about the creative process and creative opportunities.

ITEM 13: Executive Director's Report
Karl Blischke, Executive Director

Mr. Blischke echoed Chair Cohen's thanks to Agency staff for their work in developing programs and service for the Commonwealth. Blischke also thanked Council for their continued engagement and support in sector that is changing and growing.

Mr. Blischke stated that the creative sector is a cultural asset and a powerful economic driver for the state. Blischke said the Agency had a great planning year leading up to 2026.

Mr. Blischke reported that this agency will continue to support organizations that support arts education and pathways to creative careers.

Blischke stated that public investment now reaches artists more effectively by going directly into creative work that is defining our commonwealth and added that to this end, staff will be holding a series of workshops throughout the state starting in June. Blischke explained that these workshops will be for organizations of all sizes to help them navigate programs and connect them to other funding opportunities.

ITEM 14: Public Comments:

Chair Cohen explained that Seth Poppy would introduce members of the public requesting to comment in the order requests were received. Cohen explained that each speaker would have a two-minute time limit. She also reiterated that Council meetings are open to the public and that Council always welcomes public participation.

1. Arturo Espinoza – Managing Director, Rock School for Dance Education: Mr. Espinoza stated that he is representing an institution with 60+ years of service. Espinoza highlighted that the Rock School serves over 1,200 youth annually through its community program, Rock Reach. The school has relied on PCA's Annual Operating Assistance Program (AOAP) for over 20 years, which is now being discontinued. This, combined with federal NEA guideline changes eliminating similar funding, creates a structural budget crisis. Espinoza emphasized the need for clear transition plans, eligibility rules, and interim funding to maintain programming, scholarships, and teaching artist contracts. He urged the council to ensure sustainability alongside innovation, asking for clarity on pathways for long-standing, high-impact organizations.

2. Courtney Ryman – Lehigh Valley Council of the Arts: Reiterated the importance of PCA funding and asked how private citizens can be appointed to the Council. Inquired about access to the Council Book which was clarified as being available online via meeting minutes and the PCA website (pa.gov/arts). Raised concerns about the two-minute public comment limit, suggesting written submissions as an alternative for extended input.

3. Veronica Castillo Perez – Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Noted her 15 years of supporting artists through PCA's Preserving Diverse Cultures program.

Her organization, created during the pandemic with Dana Payne's support, has lost contact with PCA after Payne's departure and learned the Preserving Diverse Cultures division was eliminated. Asked how the council can claim commitment to equitable access while eliminating dedicated support for underserved communities. Criticized lack of communication between PCA leadership and grassroots arts workers. Appealed for reconsideration of fiscal sponsorship requirements, stating that artists ("worker bees") will create regardless of funding.

4. Eric César Morales, Development Director, Movimiento Administradores de Arte en Pensilvania: Questioned PCA's shift toward Creative Industries as an economic development strategy. Argued that this role should belong to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), a $700 million agency already equipped for such work. Criticized the redirection of PCA's $9.5 million budget away from core arts programs. Cited the Powering the Arts partnership, which saw funding drop from $190,000 to $150,000, grants reduced from $10,000 to $5,000, and a new one-to-one match requirement. Warned that sacrificing arts education and cultural preservation for short-term economic goals undermines the long-term creative ecosystem.

5. Jonathan Stein, thINKingDANCE.net and Philadelphia Dance Projects: Highlighted the irony that Raphael Xavier, a Philadelphia artist of color, was inducted into the Hip Hop Hall of Fame, yet the Preserving Diverse Cultures program that supported him was eliminated. Alleged that PCA council members were not adequately informed about the termination of major programs: Folk and Traditional Arts, Arts in Education ($1.5 million), and Preserving Diverse Cultures. Claimed the elimination of these programs, totaling half of PCA's $9 million budget, occurred without public notice or proper consultation. Criticized the rushed creation of a new small arts grant program with reimbursement barriers and fiscal sponsorship requirements. Called for greater transparency, public engagement, and inclusion of arts community voices in council decision-making and appointments.

6. Terry Fox – Philadelphia Dance Projects (PDP): Expressed concern over the elimination of the Flex Fund, which supported small and culturally specific arts organizations. Opposed the redirection of half the PCA budget to Creative Industries, which includes for-profit businesses and financial services. Argued this shift contradicts the core mission of artistic practice and undermines support for grassroots arts. Criticized the new small arts grant proposal as inadequate, reducing grants from $5,000 to $4,000 and lacking parity with previous funding. Applauded the tabling of the last-minute grant proposal due to lack of consultation.

7. Dr. Monica Fritschle – Pennsylvania Dance Education Organization: Spoke on behalf of dance educators across the state. Emphasized that Arts in Education residency grants are a key workforce development pathway for dance artists. Warned that eliminating these grants threatens the vocational cycle for dance professionals, especially as the first cohort of certified dance educators graduates this spring. Stressed the importance of teaching artists in schools and communities, particularly where full-time positions are unfunded. Supported the tabling of the recent memo and called for continued support of teaching artist programs.

8. Casey Corritore, Erie Arts & Culture: Spoke in support of extending the Arts in Education and Folk & Traditional Arts programs. Highlighted that existing programs included equity guardrails to ensure funding reached underserved communities and all counties. Expressed concern that Northwest Pennsylvania organizations are being excluded from new grant opportunities and that recent community engagement efforts did not adequately reflect Erie's arts community priorities. Stated that creative industries should complement, not replace, traditional arts funding.
9. Stephanie Lerner, Director of Grants, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (reading statement from President Patricia Aden): Raised concerns about PCI restructuring, abrupt program terminations, lack of transparency, and barriers created for small, emerging, and fiscally sponsored organizations. Stated that mid-sized organizations are also negatively impacted by the loss of operating support. Urged PCI to reconsider program priorities and ensure arts funding remains accessible and equitable statewide.
10. Miriam Coppersmith, Director, Thinking Dance: Spoke on the importance of general operating support for small arts organizations. Stated that PCI funding has been essential to sustaining free public dance journalism and supporting writers and artists. Expressed concern that cuts would reduce programming and artist stipends. Urged Council to slow the process, consider public feedback, and reconsider proposed funding changes.
11. Patrick Fisher, CEO, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council: Raised concerns that PCA is shifting focus from arts and culture toward economic development and "creative industries." Emphasized that art's value extends beyond economic impact and urged Council to recommit to funding art for its civic, cultural, and human value.
12. Amara Geffen**:** Left the meeting early and stated she would submit comments to Council and staff separately.
13. Justin Ayala, Arts in Education Director, York Cultural Alliance: Criticized cuts to longstanding arts programs and the elimination of teaching artists and regional partners. Objected to claims of insufficient accountability, noting that PCI itself defines reporting metrics. Expressed concern that the new strategic framework abandons arts education, underserved populations, folk arts, and statewide access in favor of business priorities. Requested reconsideration of the changes.
14. Mia Kang, Executive Director, Philadelphia Folklore Project: Discussed the importance of Folk and Traditional Arts partnerships in supporting underserved communities, preserving cultural traditions, and providing technical assistance to artists. Warned that eliminating dedicated funding would disproportionately harm grassroots cultural communities. Also criticized the abrupt process and questioned the shift toward workforce and economic development priorities.
15. Gwendolyn Bye, Artistic Director, Dance Fusion: Advocated for reinstatement of the Arts in Education program, highlighting over 35 years of experience using dance as an educational tool in schools. Shared examples of how arts integration improved student engagement, confidence, and learning outcomes. Emphasized the arts' broader role in developing well-rounded individuals and communities.
16. Mitch Swain, Former CEO, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and Board Member, Creative PA: Stated that while creative industries are important, they should not redefine PCA's mission. Expressed concern over reallocating funding away from direct arts support and

dismantling regional partnerships. Criticized the lack of transparency around new grant programs and emphasized the need for collaboration, trust, and additional funding rather than repurposing existing arts funding.

17. Suzanna Faulkner, Executive Director, Erie Arts & Culture: Spoke on behalf of artists and cultural leaders in Northwest Pennsylvania, expressing concern that rural communities are being left behind. Requested extensions of Arts in Education and Folk Arts partnerships and called for greater transparency, legislative collaboration, and equitable statewide access to arts funding. Urged PCA to prioritize community-rooted arts organizations and seek additional funding rather than redirecting existing resources.

Chair Cohen stated that Council meetings are publicly posted and open to the public. She noted that the name "PA Creative Industries" was carefully considered and reflects a nationally and internationally recognized term encompassing a broad range of artists and creators. Chair Cohen acknowledged the feedback shared during the meeting, stating that Council and staff would consider and discuss the comments received. She also emphasized the transparency of the agency's process and the extensive discussions and decisions that led to the current direction.

Mr. Blischke thanked participants for their comments and passion for the arts, noting that public participation was meaningful and appreciated. He reaffirmed Council's commitment to serving all 67 counties, including rural, suburban, and urban communities, and stated that this remains a key priority. Mr. Blischke explained that the agency's goal is to support communities through a variety of tools and a unified vision that strengthens the arts sector and fosters collaboration among arts organizations, public sector partners, and private sector stakeholders. He also emphasized the continued importance of arts education to Pennsylvania's future and stated that PA Creative Industries will continue supporting organizations that provide arts education programming. Mr. Blischke explained that he had previously served in the Arts and Education role with the Agency.

Mr. Blischke additionally recognized the contributions of Pennsylvania's certified art and music educators and reiterated that Council and staff value the public's input and remain committed to serving Pennsylvanians statewide.

ITEM 17: Adjournment

Chair Cohen asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Goldberg made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Warfield seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

Meeting adjourned at 1:03 pm.