



Pennsylvania

Creative Industries

Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Regular Council Meeting

March 26, 2025

9:00 AM

**Virtual Microsoft Teams
Meeting**



Pennsylvania
Creative Industries
Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

COUNCIL MEETING SCHEDULE

Council Meeting: March 26, 2026 – Virtual Meeting

Council Meeting: July 9, 2026 – Location TBD

Council Meeting: October 8, 2026 – Location TBD

December Council Meeting – TBD

COUNCIL MEMBERS POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Alaquiva, Emmai

1. August Wilson Center

Astorino, Dennis

1. PA Governor's Residence Preservation Committee
2. La Scuola d'Italia Galileo Galilei - Language School Board Member
3. American Heart Association – Heart Ball

Bartolotta, Senator Camera

No Conflicts Reported

Capelletti, Senator Amanda

No Conflicts Reported

Ciresi, Representative Joe

1. Steel River Playhouse
2. Kimmel Center

Cohen Susan

No Conflicts Reported

Goldberg, Susan

1. The Curtis Institute of Music
2. Dickinson College - Bluegrass on the Grass
3. Philadelphia Chamber Music Society
4. Philadelphia Orchestra Association

Gunderson, Natalee

1. The Appell Center for the Performing Arts (York, PA)

Labs, Representative Shelby

No Conflicts Reported

Morgan, Hon. William

No Conflicts Reported

Parks, Jeff

1. ArtsQuest
2. Banana Factory

Stull, Norman

1. Bucks County Symphony
2. Anthracite Symphony
3. Red Hill Community Band
4. Quakertown Band

Vilayphonh, Catzie

1. Asian Arts Initiative
2. Institute for Contemporary Art

Warfield, Tim

1. Central Pennsylvania Friends of Jazz

Zaborney, Jen

- 1 Bloomsburg University
- 2 Friends of the West Shore Theatre
- 3 Indiana University of Pennsylvania
 - Footlight Players
 - University Museum
 - IUP Research Institute Arts Pat
- 4 Susquehanna Art Museum

Updated 12/2025

Updated 3/2026



Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Agenda Regular Council Meeting March 26, 2026 9:00 AM Microsoft TEAMS

CALL TO ORDER

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| ITEM 1
(NO TAB) | Roll Call |
| ITEM 2
ACTION | Approval of Minutes
December 5, 2025 |
| ITEM 3
INFORMATION | Presentation on Pennsylvania’s First, Registered Statewide
Apprenticeship in the Creative Industries
<i>Aleks Martray, Executive Director, Big Picture Alliance</i> |
| ITEM 4
ACTION | Recommendations for Catalysts Grants
<i>Jamie Dunlap, Chief Strategy Officer</i> |
| ITEM 5
ACTION | Recommendations for Catalysts Grants Guidelines
<i>Seth Poppy, Senior Director, Innovation and Visibility</i> |
| ITEM 6
ACTION | Recommendations for Creative Districts Program Guidelines
<i>Sarah Merritt, Senior Director, Community Development</i> |
| ITEM 7
ACTION | Recommendation for Statewide Services –
Administration of Public–Private Partnership Projects
<i>Sarah Merritt, Senior Director, Community Development</i> |
| ITEM 8
INFORMATION | Planned Updates to the 26–27 Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator
Program
<i>Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce & Business Development</i> |
| ITEM 9
ACTION | Proposed Updates to the Eligibility for Creative Entrepreneur
Accelerator Program
<i>Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce & Business Development</i> |
| ITEM 10
ACTION | Proposed Grants Program for Smaller Organizations and Programs
<i>Amy Gabriele, Chief Financial Officer</i> |



**Pennsylvania
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- ITEM 11
INFORMATION** **Fiscal Year 2026–2027 Draft Budget**
Amy Gabriele, Chief of Finance & Administration

- ITEM 12
(No Tab)** **Chair’s Report**
Susan Cohen, Chair

- ITEM 13
(No Tab)** **Executive Director’s Report**
Karl Blischke, Executive Director

- ITEM 14
(No Tab)** **Public Comments**
Susan Cohen, Chair

- ITEM 15
(No Tab)** **Adjournment**

**Minutes
Council Meeting
December 4, 2025
9:00 a.m.
Virtual Meeting**

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS NOT PRESENT: Vice Chair Alaquiva, Senator Cappelletti, Ms. Vilayphonh, Ms. Zaborney

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Karl Blischke, Executive Director; Heather Doughty, Deputy Executive Director; Christopher Duerr, Program Coordinator & Grants Specialist; Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning; Amy Gabriele, Chief of Finance & Administration; Norah Johnson, Director of External Affairs; Laura Kline, Executive Assistant; Amanda Lovell, Director of Access to the Creative Sector; Sarah Merritt, Director of Creative Communities; Dana Payne, Director of Capacity Building and Creative Asset Development; Seth Poppy, Director of Data Systems & Creative Services; and Ian Rosario, Director of Arts Organizations & Arts Programs & Grants Liaison

GUESTS PRESENT: Addie Abelson, Chief Counsel; Laura Callanan, Founding Partner, Upstart Collab

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.

ITEM 2: REQUESTS FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Chair Cohen asked if the PCA received any requests for public comments. There were no requests for public comment.

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

ITEM 3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the October 9, 2025, meeting minutes.

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

ITEMS 4: Recommendations for Creative Sector Flex Fund Awards – Region 7 Grants (Schuylkill, Berks, and Lancaster Counties)

Amanda Lovell, Director of Access to the Creative Sector

Ms. Lovell reported that following Council approval in July 2025, the Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff facilitated the collection, eligibility review, and panel review of the Creative Sector Flex Fund applications for Region 7 which encompasses organizations in Berks, Lancaster, and Schuylkill counties. Lovell explained that currently, there is no designated partner for Region 7 and added that the applications opened on September 1, 2025, and closed on October 31, 2025.

Ms. Lovell stated that there were 28 applications received, of which 19 were deemed eligible to move forward to the panel review process. Ms. Lovell indicated that the panel review process consisted of four Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff members who reviewed each of the 19 applications using the same guidelines and scoring rubric in line with the process for the rest of the state.

Ms. Lovell reported that agency staff are recommending approval for the 17 organizations that are listed in the Council Memo to receive funding through the Creative Sector Flex Fund Program in Region 7 for 2025-2026. Ms. Lovell stated that the total recommended funding amount is \$85,000.

Chair Cohen thanked staff for stepping up to take care of this situation.

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.

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

ITEM 5: Recommendations for Apprenticeship Grants

Amanda Lovell, Director of Access to the Creative Sector

Ms. Lovell reported that at the July 2025 Council Meeting, 30 Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship grants were approved and are now moving to award agreements following finalization of the state budget. Ms. Lovell explained that a further review of all applications, including seven initially deemed incomplete, was conducted and it was discovered that an administrative oversight was identified. Ms. Lovell stated that to ensure consistency and equitable funding practices, the seven applicants were given the opportunity for eligibility re-evaluation and panel review.

Ms. Lovell reported that agency staff conducted the review using the established guidelines and scoring rubric for the 2025-2026 cycle and are recommending additional applicants for funding, totaling \$13,000. Ms. Lovell stated that the second page of the Council memo contains the names of the candidates recommended for funding.

Chair Cohen thanked Ms. Lovell for acting on this situation and asked her to provide a brief overview of what each apprenticeship is for.

Ms. Lovell provided the overview of each approved grantee and listed where, in the state, they are from.

Chair Cohen asked if it is possible to receive a slide or video presentation of the completed projects and Ms. Lovell said she would be able to provide this type of follow-up to Council.

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. Stull made a motion to approve the recommendation. Ms. Gunderson seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

ITEM 6: Recommendations for Arts in Education (AIE) Partnership Award Conditions

Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning

Ms. Dunlap explained that this recommendation addresses the potential impact presented by the FY2025-2026 budget impasse on the planning of residencies for AIE Partnerships.

Ms. Dunlap stated that agency staff recommends that Council authorize a waiver of the 1:1 match requirement for AIE Partners' artist residency activities supported with Fiscal Year 2025-2026 funds.

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.

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

ITEM 7: Recommendations for Innovation & Impact Guidelines

Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning

Ms. Dunlap reported that agency staff created guidelines for the Innovation and Impact Grant program, which will support multi-year initiatives that enhance visibility and/or foster innovation within Pennsylvania's creative sector.

Ms. Dunlap provided an overview of the guidelines and explained that projects should strengthen public awareness, advance new ideas and partnerships, and amplify the sector's contributions to communities, the economy, and the workforce.

Dunlap stated that applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, with funding recommendations presented quarterly to Council. She explained that eligible applicants

include Pennsylvania-based nonprofits, government units, colleges/universities, and school districts providing creative sector programming or services. Ms. Dunlap indicated that grant awards are expected to range from \$100,000 to \$150,000 over 24–36 months, require a 1:1 cash match, limit administrative costs to 20%, and may be awarded to an organization no more than once every five years.

Chair Cohen stated that she likes that these grants will be rolling.

Ms. Goldberg asked for clarification on the issue of grantees working with other not-for-profit organizations or if they are the nucleus.

Ms. Dunlap reported that it could be either and provided an example of a request for proposals for activation and promotion.

Ms. Dunlap also stated that one of the grants awarded was to the Pittsburg Glass Center, which is aligned with Contemporary Craft and the Union Project in Pittsburgh. Dunlap explained that these organizations are collaborating and hosting a large conference that will bring awareness about what is available for fine craft makers.

Ms. Goldberg then asked for clarification about the duration of the project, and Ms. Dunlap stated that projects will be two to three years.

Ms. Parks asked for information about how this program will be promoted.

Ms. Dunlap stated that it would be promoted through the agency's normal channels (social media, website, LinkedIn.) She said that agency staff will also promote this opportunity to communities around the state as well as to other state agencies.

Chair Cohen asked if eligibility is limited to nonprofit organizations, universities, and government agencies. Ms. Dunlap confirmed that it is.

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.

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

ITEM 8: Recommendations for Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program Administrator

Amanda Lovell, Director of Access to the Creative Sector

Ms. Lovell reported that at its October 2025 meeting, Council authorized guidelines for a Request for Proposals (RFP) to select a statewide administrator for the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) program. Lovell explained that the selected administrator will serve a five-year term, subject to annual award agreements and availability of funds, and may reapply at the end of the term.

Ms. Lovell stated that the statewide administrator model is intended to streamline the application process, strengthen engagement with grantees, expand resources such as grant funding and business planning workshops, improve access to program data, and support development of a statewide network of creative entrepreneurs.

Ms. Lovell reported that agency staff received nine inquiries regarding the RFP. She explained that two organizations were deemed ineligible due to financial or business model constraints, and two withdrew citing capacity limitations. Ms. Lovell indicated that five organizations ultimately submitted complete applications.

Lovell stated that applications were reviewed by five staff members using the published criteria: alignment with approach, impact and reach, experience with comparable projects, and organizational capacity.

Ms. Lovell reported that agency staff recommends selecting Bridgeway Capital as the CEA statewide administrator beginning with the 2026–2027 program cycle. She stated that pending passage of the FY 2026–2027 state budget and availability of funds, agency staff recommends awarding a \$1,000,000 non-matching grant, including:

- \$700,000 for regranting to approximately 140 creative entrepreneurs annually through a cohort model that includes networking, knowledge sharing, and business planning.
- \$300,000 for programmatic and administrative costs, including statewide outreach, business support programming, marketing and training workshops, program implementation, and data collection and reporting.

Ms. Lovell stated that agency staff also recommend awarding Bridgeway Capital \$25,000 to support program development in advance of the September 1, 2026, launch. She added that planned development activities include the creation of a program webpage, the selection of a grant application platform, outreach visits to partner organizations, and engagement with partners to ensure equitable statewide participation.

Chair Cohen commented that she attended a conference and heard someone from Bridgeway speak and she was very impressed and pleased that Bridgeway will be working with our agency and to reach creatives statewide.

Chair Cohen asked if Bridgeway would make sure that our agency is highlighted and promoted. Ms. Lovell confirmed that Bridgeway is very collaborative and have a thinktank approach of working together with PA Creative Industries to impact Pennsylvania's creative entrepreneurs. Lovell added that Bridgeway understands needs at a much different level for creative entrepreneurs.

Ms. Goldberg asked for clarification about the review process and asked if Bridgeway will conduct it and if they will make the decisions. Ms. Lovell stated that Bridgeway will conduct both the review and approval process and gave examples of previous situations where they did this. She also explained that they will use a panel review process.

Ms. Goldberg asked if these are individuals or small organizations and Ms. Lovell replied that Bridgeway will continue to focus on the same individuals they are currently focusing on and she provided an overview of the types of individuals who would be eligible for these grants.

Mr. Blischke thanked Ms. Lovell for her work on this initiative and explained that this is an improved entrepreneur accelerator program that will continue the existing program but will be better for creative entrepreneurs.

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.

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

ITEM 9: Recommendations for Creative Catalysts

Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning

Ms. Dunlap provided an overview of the below listed Creative Catalyst Grant recommendations, which total \$57,000.

Applicant: Mummers Museum Inc. **Proposal:** Mummers Museum Festival of Many Colors

Ms. Dunlap reported that the Mummers Museum has partnered with Philly Caribbean Carnival and Carnaval de Puebla en Philadelphia to launch the 2026 Festival of Many Colors, a multi-week event series featuring public workshops in music, costuming, and dance from the three traditions. Dunlap stated that the initiative highlights shared elements of the traditions—colorful costumes, music, and public celebration—while encouraging collaboration, participation, and broader public awareness.

Ms. Dunlap explained that the series will begin with an opening reception at the Mummers Museum in February 2026, featuring a WHY Y-moderated panel discussion with representatives from each tradition. She stated that following the reception, weekly workshops will be held at the Mummers Museum and led by experienced community members. Dunlap explained that planned workshops include a steel pan drumming workshop, a “Dance Like a Mummer Fancy Brigade” workshop, and a Puebla-style headdress-making workshop.

Ms. Dunlap indicated that the festival will conclude with a public one-day spring celebration in May 2026 and added that performers and craftspeople participating in the workshops and festival represent Southeastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York. Ms. Dunlap explained that promotion will occur through regional media outlets including Philatinos Radio, WHY Y, and WMMR.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant: Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

Proposal: Shippensburg University Student Made Store

Ms. Dunlap reported that Shippensburg University plans to launch the Student-Made Store, a student-run marketplace designed to support creative student entrepreneurs in building brands, selling their work, and gaining real-world business experience.

Ms. Dunlap explained that a Fall 2025 feasibility study confirmed strong student interest, and the program will be fully implemented in 2026. She stated that Shippensburg will become the first Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) institution to launch the initiative and will serve as the pilot site for the system.

Ms. Dunlap reported that as the pilot, Shippensburg University will develop the contracting and vendor framework to support adoption by other PASSHE universities, positioning the institution as a model for student entrepreneurship and innovation. She explained that the program will engage students as creators and managers while also involving faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and regional community members as partners, mentors, and customers. She added that other PASSHE campuses will benefit from the implementation model and feasibility outcomes.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant: PA Jazz Alliance Inc.

Proposal: PA250: "Our Story" = A Jazz Journey

Ms. Dunlap stated that PA Jazz Alliance has asked for support of a series of performances titled PA250: "Our Story" which will be presented across Pennsylvania in October and November 2026. Ms. Dunlap reported that confirmed locations include MCG Pittsburgh, Mercyhurst University (Erie), and Misericordia University (Dallas), with additional performances pending in Harrisburg and Philadelphia.

Ms. Dunlap stated that the program will feature a jazz ensemble composed of Pennsylvania musicians, accompanied by narration from local representatives and supported by historic photographs and film. She added that the performances will highlight the legacy of Pennsylvania-born jazz artists, including Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Henry Mancini, Benny Golson, and Billie Holiday, and explore the state's role in the development of jazz and its influence on American culture as part of the nation's 250th anniversary commemoration.

Request: \$25,000

Recommendation: \$25,000

Applicant: Citizens for The Arts in Pennsylvania

Proposal: Creative Connectivity within the Sector

Ms. Dunlap reported that Creative Pennsylvania, formerly Citizens for the Arts in Pennsylvania, has realigned its strategy to strengthen the Commonwealth’s creative ecosystem in the post-COVID era. Dunlap stated that the organization will focus on three priorities: professional development and networking, cultural tourism and marketing, and arts-friendly policy.

Ms. Dunlap explained that beginning in 2026, Creative Pennsylvania will launch regional gatherings across the state as its first statewide initiative, Create Connectivity within the Sector. Dunlap stated that in partnership with community-based arts organizations, these convenings will bring together artists, cultural organizations, creative businesses, and arts education groups to foster professional growth, strengthen regional networks, and identify sector needs.

Ms. Dunlap explained Creative Pennsylvania will provide resources to host the gatherings, document findings, and engage experts or technical assistance to address identified needs.

Ms. Dunlap provided an overview of the planned locations and timeframes:

- 3 Dots Downtown, State College – Q1 2026
- Center for Creative Exploration, Pennsylvania College of Art & Design – Q2 2026
- Erie Arts & Culture – Q3 2026

Request: \$9,000

Recommendation: \$9,000

Applicant: New Castle Public Library (NCPL)

Proposal: Creatives Across the District

Ms. Dunlap reported that the New Castle Public Library (NCPL), the district center serving four counties, is planning to host *Creatives Across the District*, a series of four community engagement events featuring local artists.

Dunlap stated that one event will take place in each district county Butler, Mercer, Lawrence, and Armstrong—bringing together artists, libraries, and community members. Ms. Dunlap explained that events will include artist showcases and demonstrations, participation by local artisans, and opportunities for libraries in each county to promote services and programs. She indicated that each event will be hosted at a local community center and will be coordinated by NCPL staff and district libraries.

Ms. Dunlap reported that the events will occur monthly over four months in spring 2026.

Dunlap added that following the series, NCPL will develop implementation guidelines and a program model for other library districts and indicated that the model will be shared

through the District Resource Website, library forums, and the Pennsylvania Library Association Annual Conference in October 2026.

Request: \$3,000

Recommendation: \$3,000

Representative Ciresi stated that he has a personal relationship with an organization involved in the PA 250 jazz and would abstain from voting on this action item.

Ms. Goldberg asked for clarification of the Shippensburg project and Ms. Dunlap provided an explanation, presented examples and shared a website.

Ms. Dunlap stated that she will be placing language in each grantee's approval letter asking them to let her know about event details so that she can share this information with Council.

Ms. Cohen asked for information about the dates for the PA 250 jazz event and Ms. Dunlap said she would share these dates with Council.

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 recommendation. Ms. Gunderson seconded the motion. Motion carried, Representative Ciresi abstained and none opposed.

ITEM 10: Recommendations for PA Creative Asset Program Guidelines

Amy Gabriele, Chief of Finance & Administration

Ms. Gabriele explained that at the October meeting, Council approved guidelines for the PA Creative Asset Program. She stated that Agency staff recommends the following clarifications to the Guidelines:

- Add "(arts)" after "creative" in the second bullet under Eligibility.
- Add the following to the list of ineligible applicants:
 - Local governments, including counties and municipalities
 - Libraries, including municipal, county, authority, and nonprofit libraries

Ms. Gabriele explained that eligibility requirements remain that applicants must be Pennsylvania-based nonprofit organizations with missions serving the creative (arts) sector and demonstrate average annual revenue between \$100,000 and \$2,000,000 over the past two years.

Ms. Gabriele provided an update of the Strategies for Success (SFS) program and stated that beginning in FY 2026–2027, applicants who previously applied to SFS will be eligible under the PA Creative Asset Program. Ms. Gabriele explained that SFS will no longer operate as a standalone program and will instead be integrated into the Creative Asset Program. She stated that elements of SFS, such as collaboration and networking

opportunities for grantees, may continue through webinars and convenings organized by discipline or PA Creative Industries focus areas.

Chair Cohen asked Council Members if they understand the basis of the Creative Assets Program.

Ms. Goldberg asked for some examples and Ms. Gabriele provided examples and explained that the program is open to organizations between \$100,000 and \$2 million as demonstrated in their IRS filing.

Ms. Goldberg asked if this will operate differently than with SFS other than just a change in the wording. Ms. Gabriele stated that this will operate differently and explained that not all the organizations from SFS will be eligible.

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.

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

ITEM 11: Information Item: Pennsylvania Creative Industries Regional Hub

Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning

Ms. Dunlap stated that through the agency's strategic planning process, feedback from community members, state agencies, organizations, and artists identified key priorities for strengthening Pennsylvania's creative sector. Dunlap reported that in addition to funding, priorities included increased collaboration across communities, expanded training and networking opportunities, talent and business attraction and retention, greater sector visibility, and the development of signature creative industry events.

Ms. Dunlap explained that in response, agency staff are developing guidelines to establish Pennsylvania Creative Industries Hubs. She stated that these regional hubs would serve as the agency's regional representatives and be embedded within local community and economic development networks. Dunlap indicated that these hubs are envisioned as conveners and connectors that support regional creative economies and strengthen the statewide creative industries ecosystem.

Ms. Dunlap reported that program components and draft guidelines will be presented to Council at the March 2026 meeting. She stated that agency staff are currently evaluating potential hub responsibilities, including expanding visibility of agency programs, participating in existing economic and workforce development networks, hosting regional convenings, maintaining regional resource centers, providing professional development and technical assistance, and administering regional mini-grant programs.

ITEM 12: Presentation by Upstart Co-Lab on Impact Investing

Laura Callanan, Founding Partner

Mr. Blischke introduced Laura Callanan, the Founding Partner of Upstart Co-Lab.

Ms. Callanan presented a PowerPoint to Council about Upstart Co-Lab and the work it does in connecting capital with creative people to make a profit and make a difference. A discussion with Council members followed.

ITEM 13: Chair's Report

Susan Cohen, Chair

Chair Cohen congratulated Senator Bartolotta for receiving a Workforce Development Award for serving on the Pittsburgh's Film Office Board of Trustees.

Chair Cohen reported that agency staff will be attending the Carnegie Mellon University's Career and Technical Education festival which will highlight student work on entertainment technology and games. Cohen stated that this is a great asset for Pennsylvania's future development in the creative sector.

Chair Cohen provided some information about the agency's Creative Business Loan Program. She indicated that the total loans are \$8.5 million and explained that these loans have gone toward working capital, equipment and marketing.

Chair Cohen reported that Poetry Out Loud is a national poetry competition and indicated that regional competitions will take place in January and February. She stated that the state championships will be held in Harrisburg in early March and added that dates and details will be provided to Council members.

Chair Cohen stated because of all the changes in grants and programs, she asked Mr. Blischke to prepare a packet of informational materials that detail the new programs and will also include a current list of the grants that have been issued. Mr. Blischke stated that he will send this information following the Council Meeting.

ITEM 12: Executive Director's Report

Karl Blischke, Executive Director

Mr. Blischke provided a status update regarding the agency's strategic plan. He explained that now that the budget has passed, agency staff are sending out award letters. Mr. Blischke commended Amy Gabriele, Seth Poppy and Ian Rosario for their work in getting the awards distributed. Blischke stated that agency staff will be in communication with grantees about new grant opportunities for next year.

Mr. Blischke commended Ms. Dunlap for her work in connecting the art sector with workforce resources and added that he is excited about this work continuing.

Mr. Blischke reported that Council awarded a Creative Catalyst grant to Big Picture Alliance, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit media arts organization that collaborates

with a variety of youth programs. He shared that this grant assisted in the proposal development for a state registered apprenticeship for multimedia producers through the Department of Labor & Industries' Apprenticeship Training Office.

ITEM 17: Adjournment

Meeting Adjourned at 11:05 am



MEMO

DATE: March 13, 2026
TO: Council Members
FROM: Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning
CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director
RE: Recommendations for Creative Catalyst Grants

MESSAGE:

Staff presents the following recommendations for Creative Catalyst support in Fiscal Year 2025-2026.

Applicant:

Pennsylvania State University

Proposal:

The Humanities in the Real World: A Video Storytelling Approach

"The Humanities in the Real World: A Video Storytelling Approach" is a comprehensive community engagement initiative. At the core of this initiative Humanities Works, at Penn State Greater Allegheny, will create a 30-minute public media-broadcast documentary that highlights the value of humanities and liberal arts innovations. This project will demonstrate intersections such as arts, philosophy, English, communications, and related disciplines with people and organizations that have found success out of the classroom and the real world through diversity in representation and thought.

A unique aspect of this project will be a professionally-designed and managed integrated marketing communications (IMC) campaign. A complementary IMC will bridge academic inquiry and community practice through social media, traditional media relations, and an on-air tentpole promotional campaign, starting with partnerships with three of the state's PBS affiliates. The campaign will include premiere screenings in the cities where the

documentary will air first: Pittsburgh, State College and Harrisburg. Partnerships with these TV multimedia outlets will support collaboration and distribution.

With these community screenings to engage the public in the importance of the humanities, a complementary series of educational resources will be produced and distributed for teachers/parents/college students/the general public, showcasing the value of humanities endeavors that lead to long-term success. These materials will include digital and printed materials to be shared through the Pennsylvania PBS partnership and its relationship to the arts and creative communities in the Commonwealth, through the contacts and media relations efforts of The Pennsylvania State University, and the network of contacts of the video production team, as well.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant:

FringeArts

Proposal:

Building Professional Development Opportunities for Fringe Festival Artists Across PA

In 2025, FringeArts piloted a series of free workshops for working artists, technicians, and other creatives in partnership with Philadelphia Scenic Works and ArtistsU. Positive feedback from both facilitators and attendees on the value of providing resources at no cost to Philadelphia’s artists has inspired the organization to consider the impact that these workshops can have on the artistic communities across the Commonwealth. The annual Philadelphia Fringe Festival is one of a growing number of fringe festivals across Pennsylvania, from Harrisburg, to Scranton, to Pittsburgh. Both Harrisburg Fringe and Pittsburgh Fringe plan to partner with FringeArts to create cross-festival learning opportunities. Cultivating relationships with these festivals will help them reach artist communities that face similar challenges to those that they work with in Philadelphia, and further understand how to contribute to the development of a resilient artistic workforce.

The project has three main activities to advance the objectives of creating low-barrier, no cost resources for artists across Pennsylvania, and further connect artistic communities across the Commonwealth: touring the intensive day-and-a-half workshop “Building a Sustainable Life as an Artist” led by Andrew Simonet; travel to other fringe festivals across the state to assess local artist needs, and provide funding for those festivals’ key leaders to do the same in Philadelphia; and the video recording and editing of workshops for statewide dissemination.

Request: \$18,175.50

Recommendation: \$18,175.50

Applicant:

Lancaster Fringe Festival

Proposal:

Lancaster Fringe Festival

The Lancaster Fringe Festival is a new nonprofit organizing a four-day inaugural festival in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, May 21 - 24, 2026. The organization's mission is to bring together a community of creators inspired to share their stories through theater, music, and art that highlight human connection in new and exciting ways. Lancaster Fringe Festival serves the region by gathering arts practitioners, developing and refining their work, and providing opportunities to share it.

Lancaster Fringe Festival is designed to be an annual event, starting with a scale of about 40 performances in about 20 venues throughout downtown Lancaster. There will also be street artists outside venues and in central locations. The vision is to animate downtown Lancaster with indoor and outdoor performances. There is a central square where street performers can bring attention to nearby galleries and nightlife venues.

The inaugural festival will be in downtown Lancaster, but the organization plans to expand into all quadrants of the city in subsequent years, to further the goal of providing access to the arts. To keep in line with the organization's focus on access, they plan to charge audience members \$10 to receive a bracelet that will allow them to enter all venues and see any production throughout the festival.

Lancaster Fringe will work with Discover Lancaster and the City's Tourism Office to promote the festival across the county and region.

Request: \$7,491

Recommendation: \$7,491

Applicant:

Kareem's Mission

Proposal:

Kareem's Mission Autism Inclusion Art Gallery

Kareem's Mission is launching a new, public-facing, autism inclusion art exhibit, designed to elevate children and youth on the autism spectrum as artists, presented with professional standards, ensure broad public access, and achieve statewide reach. Council funding will support the launch of a curated exhibition model that includes public presentation, accessibility design, statewide participation, and media amplification.

The Kareem's Mission Autism Inclusion Art Gallery is a youth art exhibition designed to showcase youth artists on the autism spectrum from ages 3 to 21. Although focused on

Central PA, Kareem’s Mission will accept submissions for the showcase from across all 50 states.

The exhibition will be on display at Kareem’s Mission Center (Bart A. Milano Hall, Central Penn College) from April 1 – 11, 2026, culminating in a formal luncheon on April 11, where local elected officials will have the opportunity to meet the artists and provide remarks. The luncheon will bring together participants, families, artists, and community members to support the artists, with confirmed media coverage from PennLive, ABC’s Good Day PA, and Fox 43 News. The exhibition will be on display at Harrisburg Area Community College’s Harrisburg and York campuses, several schools in the Central Dauphin School District, Greenwood Elementary School and Lebanon Valley College. The Cumberland Valley School District and the Lebanon County School District also are possible locations to display the exhibition.

Artwork will be displayed by age group and presented alongside pieces from prominent professional artists, reinforcing the message that participants’ work is valued and worthy of public recognition. Details will be included about the artist, alongside their work, highlighting their accomplishments and interests. Each artwork will be professionally presented, with digital submissions printed on canvas when applicable, with adherence to professional presentation standards, as well as clear labeling and accessible designs.

Beyond showcasing art, the project is intentionally structured to foster confidence, collaboration, and follow-through through a guided creative process. By publicly presenting their work and interacting with the attendees, artists gain self-esteem, social engagement skills, and a sense of accomplishment. Rather than simply being told that their work has value, young artists experience that value firsthand by seeing their art displayed, respected, and celebrated within a professional, community-centered setting.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant:

Center For Energy and Computer Education Excellence

Proposal:

Steel City Urban Block Party

The Steel City Urban Block Party, is a free, public-facing arts and performance festival taking place on Saturday, April 25, 2026, outside the Petersen Events Center in Oakland during the Steel City Draft weekend multi-day activation.

The Urban Block Party serves as the anchor of a broader, coordinated slate of Draft Weekend events that integrate live performance, visual arts, and paid creative labor into one of the most visible civic moments in Pittsburgh’s history. The festival will feature performers and visual artists recruited from across Pennsylvania, including Pittsburgh, Erie, and Philadelphia, alongside creative entrepreneurs exhibiting original work in a curated

outdoor marketplace. Participating artists will be provided with tents and tables, allowing for professional presentation, direct sales, and audience engagement.

A signature component of the project is a competitive performance pipeline that elevates Pennsylvania talent to high-visibility stages. On Friday, April 24, 2026, artists from across the Commonwealth will participate in an “American Idol-style” showcase at Avalon Social in Pittsburgh’s South Side. Selected performers will advance to perform on Saturday at the Jeezy concert at the Petersen Events Center, appearing on stage prior to a nationally touring headliner.

Creative Catalyst funds would not only support the Urban Block Party but also additional Draft Weekend events requiring paid creative and production workers, including:

- Rep Your Team Jersey Nite with DJ Envy at Avalon Social on Friday, April 24, 2026
- Tay Tay Dance Party at the Byham Theater, requiring backstage, artist support, and production assistance, Saturday, April 25, 2026
- Back-of-house and production support tied to the Jeezy concert and related activations

By intentionally activating neighborhoods outside the official NFL Draft footprint—specifically Oakland and the South Side—the project expands economic participation, directs visitor spending into local corridors, and showcases Pennsylvania’s creative workforce during a moment of national attention.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant:

ArtPhilly

Proposal:

What Now: 2026

From late May to July 4, 2026, in tandem with our nation’s 250th anniversary celebration, ArtPhilly will present What Now: 2026, a city-wide multidisciplinary arts festival. What Now: 2026 will place artists, neighborhoods, and arts organizations at the center of a critical civic dialogue on the country’s past, present, and future.

What Now: 2026 will present over 30 original works which represent the full breadth of Philadelphia’s rich creative expressions, spanning various mediums including music, dance, theater, visual arts, film, and storytelling. As part of What Now: 2026, ArtPhilly will partner with more than 40 institutions throughout the city and highlight the unique neighborhoods of Philly, from the Parkway and Germantown to the Historic District and West Philly. The festival will spotlight Philadelphia — its communities, institutions, and creators — as an important cultural and artistic epicenter.

Among other projects, What Now: 2026 programming will include an original play by Anna Deavere Smith; a first-time joint production from the Martha Graham Dance Company and PHILADANCO!; a week of performances and workshops by King Britt which will celebrate Philadelphia Black Electronic Movements; original compositions from Philadelphia Young Playwrights; contemporary spins on the sounds of 1776 by Black Music City musicians who will take residency at the Museum of the American Revolution; and much more.

ArtPhilly believes that artists are the best interpreters of our nation's anniversary. They can capture the struggles, the triumphs, and the wonder of our history. A measure of their success, beyond attracting audiences from all over the world, will be instilling a sense of pride in Philadelphia citizens and increasing their attendance at arts and culture venues throughout the city— especially at smaller initiatives and in neighborhoods. Festival attendance will provide economic stimulus to the city and surrounding regions, advancing economic equity within the Philadelphia area.

What Now: 2026 offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to spotlight the diverse, unique, and brilliant art of Philadelphia. The festival will demonstrate that the city is a critical destination for arts and culture — not just for our country's 250th anniversary in 2026, but for every year to come.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant:

Center For Metal Arts Inc.

Proposal:

Center for Metal Arts' Passport Program Promotion

The Center for Metal Arts (CMA) is a nonprofit forging school located within the historic Cambria Iron and Steel National Historic Landmark site in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Core to CMA's mission of creating and maintaining the strongest possible educational forging program is the preservation through active use of the historic Cambria Iron and Steel industrial forge shop and its equipment. CMA's educational programming keeps this heritage craft of industry alive and relevant by teaching traditional forging techniques with historic tools through curriculum and hands-on experience, giving these practices renewed purpose with a focus on functionality, creativity, and public engagement.

The Passport Program is CMA's new 12-month intensive educational and professional development program for early-career and emerging blacksmiths and metalworkers. The program is designed to give participants the time, access, and facilities needed to build strong technical skills and gain experience across the most common and sustainable career paths in the craft.

CMA is applying for a Creative Catalyst grant to support a “road show” of the new Passport Program through statewide public demonstrations, outreach, and related promotional activities.

All promotional materials will clearly identify Pennsylvania as the home of the Passport Program and emphasize the Commonwealth’s role in preserving and advancing the craft of forging through education and the active use of historic industrial equipment.

Support from the Creative Catalyst program will help ensure that more people across Pennsylvania and beyond can see, understand, and participate in the Passport Program, thereby strengthening both CMA’s mission and Pennsylvania’s role as a place where creativity thrives and industrial heritage is preserved through use.

CMA will promote the Passport Program through a day-long public forging and blacksmithing demonstration at Carrie Furnaces in western Pennsylvania in partnership with Rivers of Steel. CMA will also conduct a public forging demonstration at the National Museum of Industrial Heritage in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This event extends the project’s reach to eastern Pennsylvania and reinforces the shared industrial history connecting Bethlehem, Johnstown, and other steel communities across the Commonwealth. And in central Pennsylvania, CMA will use the Cambria Iron Conference in Johnstown as a key promotional platform for the Passport Program. During the September 12, 2026, conference, CMA will focus on promoting and recruiting for the 2027 Passport Program. These Passport Program participants will exhibit work and present gallery talks at the following year’s conference, providing a public presentation of research and work developed in the program.

Request: \$12,500

Recommendation: \$12,500

Applicant:

RealTime Interventions RealTime Arts

Proposal:

Healthy Stories SWPA

In 2026, RealTime Arts will partner with Allegheny Health Network (AHN) to launch the Equitable Dinners community theatre initiative. Equitable Dinners is an award-winning community initiative launched by Atlanta’s Out of Hand Theater (OOH) that uses the power of art and shared meals to facilitate vital conversations about challenges facing local communities. A typical Equitable Dinner begins with a professionally performed ten-minute play based on real-life experiences gathered in community listening sessions. Then, participants break into groups of 5-10 to share a meal. This act serves as a "social equalizer," breaking down barriers to discussion. Finally, trained facilitators guide guests in conversation, using the play as a springboard.

OOH's model has drawn national attention since its origin in 2019, winning the New York Times "Best Theater of 2020" Award and serving thousands of Georgians. Licensed in 2024, it was adopted by Mixed Blood Theater in Minneapolis, where it has expanded each season. RealTime Arts will now bring this impactful model to Pennsylvania starting in July 2026, joining these companies in examining the topic "We Hold These Truths," in honor of the nation's 250th anniversary.

There will be two rounds of Equitable Dinners in this program: a premiere/ pilot in Pittsburgh in July, consisting of six shows over two weeks in three homes, and a final, larger public performance. The series' working title is, "We Hold These Truths–A Seat at the Table" and will address identity, access, and health as it relates to food. An original play will be written based on virtual listening sessions in communities throughout Pittsburgh.

The listening sessions will be coordinated by RealTime Arts in collaboration with AHN's Center for Inclusion Health and Pennsylvania Community Health Worker Collaborative (PACHW), a growing network of community healthcare workers and allies. RealTime Arts will coordinate and present a virtual reading of the first draft of each play with professional actors, to which all project participants and stakeholders across PA will be invited. Feedback gathered at these readings will be used by the playwright in their writing of the final drafts, to ensure that the plays represent participants' lived experience accurately.

Using evaluations from July, RealTime Arts will duplicate the model in Fall/ Winter in collaboration with AHN, focusing on a topic chosen through broader state-wide community listening sessions with health care workers and clients of AHN's Center for Inclusion Health (CIH). Topics will again fall under the theme "We Hold These Truths." The second round of performances will take place in multiple locations throughout Southwest PA.

Request: \$10,000

Recommendation: \$10,000

Applicant:

Art-Reach Inc.

Proposal:

Leadership Exchange for Art and Disability (LEAD) Conference

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. 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.

As such, 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. In addition, 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.

During the conference, 700 creative professionals working to make the arts in their institutions more accessible to people with disabilities will converge on Philadelphia.

Art-Reach plans to cover conference registration for 140 local arts professionals in SE Pennsylvania. Over three days, conference attendees will learn about arts access during dozens of concurrent sessions hosted at the Marriott Downtown. Additionally, they will 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



MEMO

DATE: March 26, 2026
TO: Council Members
FROM: Seth Poppy, Senior Director of Innovation & Visibility
CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director
RE: Proposed Revisions to 2026-2027 Creative Catalyst Grant Program Guidelines

MESSAGE:

Staff recommends approval of the attached 2026-2027 Creative Catalyst Program Guidelines, reflecting ongoing refinement of the program to ensure clarity, consistency, and strong alignment with Pennsylvania Creative Industries' key areas. The application process, applicant eligibility, and match requirements remain unchanged.

Several sections have been strengthened to improve program administration and reinforce the intended statewide impact of Creative Catalyst investments.

Updates are detailed below:

- **Restriction on Duplicate Funding**
A new provision specifies that "this grant may not fund activities supported by other Pennsylvania Creative Industries grant awards," ensuring responsible and non-duplicative use of public funds. This includes the use of matching funds.
- **Grant Maximum**
The maximum award amount has been set at \$25,000, to ensure broader distribution of resources across the Commonwealth.
- **Assessment Criteria Revision**
The assessment criterion previously titled "Demonstrate statewide reach and benefit" has been updated to "Demonstrate statewide or broad regional reach and benefit," allowing for strong regional initiatives while maintaining emphasis on broad public benefit.

- Reimbursement-Based Funding Structure

The guidelines now state that this is a reimbursement-based grant program. Thus, grantees must incur and pay for eligible expenses before submitting an invoice or final report with required documentation—such as receipts, invoices, and proof of payment—to receive reimbursement.

These refinements strengthen the program's clarity, transparency, and alignment with agency priorities. Staff respectfully requests the Council's review and approval of the updated guidelines.



2026-2027 Application Guidelines Creative Catalyst Grant Program

Due dates: June 12, 2026; September 11, 2026; November 13, 2026, February 12, 2027
Performance period: September 1, 2026, to August 31, 2027

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About Pennsylvania Creative Industries

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

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

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

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

Creative Industries Defined

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

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

About the Creative Catalyst Grant

Creative Catalyst grants support new initiatives and opportunities that advance strategies for empowering, connecting and amplifying creatives and creative industries and their contributions to Pennsylvania's communities, economy and workforce. This funding opportunity is designed to encourage and support projects and events that have the potential for statewide or broad regional impact on the creative sector. Creative Catalyst grants are not designed to provide ongoing support or to fund projects that occur on an annual or regular basis, but rather to help support special events or unique, strategic opportunities. **This grant may not fund activities supported by other Pennsylvania Creative Industries grant awards.**

Applications to this program will be assessed based on the degree to which they:

1.) Align with one or more of Pennsylvania Creative Industries' five key areas:

- Asset Development
- Workforce Development
- Community Development
- Visibility
- Policy

2.) Demonstrate statewide **or broad regional** reach and benefit.

3.) Demonstrate capacity to carry out project as proposed.

Eligibility

- Applicants must be a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation, unit of government; college or university; or school district providing creative sector programming and/or services in Pennsylvania.
 - Applicants are required to provide proof of incorporation and activity in Pennsylvania before an application will be reviewed or awarded funds.
- Fiscal agents and fiscal sponsors are not eligible to apply for Creative Catalyst funding.

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.
- Competitions.
- Performances and exhibitions not available to the public.
- Activities for which academic credit is given.
- **Activities supported by other Pennsylvania Creative Industries grant awards.**

Please note the following:

- **Grant amounts will not exceed \$25,000.**
- No more than 20% of the grant award may be used for administrative expenses.
- A confirmed 1:1 cash match is required.
- Applicants can only receive a Creative Catalyst grant once every three years.
- Creative Catalyst funding is not designed to support established programs, ongoing operations, or serve as an annual source of funds.
- **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.**

Narrative and Submission Process

Narrative:

1. Provide a summary of the proposed project. (4,000 character maximum.)
2. How does the proposed project align with one or more of Pennsylvania Creative Industries' five key areas? (3,000 character maximum.)
3. What is the project's statewide **or broad regional** reach and benefit to the creative sector? (3,000 character maximum.)
4. How will the funds be used if awarded? (3000 character maximum.)

Required attachment:

- Proposed project budget including match. Please note that matching funds must be committed.

Submission process:

1. **Read this document thoroughly.**
2. **Before applying**, contact Seth Poppy at spoppy@pa.gov.
3. **Register and apply** through Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) grants management system: <https://grants.pa.gov/>.
 - Note: You must register for a Keystone Login in order to apply through the grants management system. You may register here if you have not already: <https://keystonelogin.pa.gov/Account/Register>
4. Submit your application.
5. Please note that the Commonwealth uses ACH to make grant payments. Register for ACH Authorization at the following link, if you have not already done so: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennvest/programs-and-services/financing/ach-authorization-change-form>

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 Seth Poppy: spoppy@pa.gov or (717) 787-1520

Proposal Review Process

Review Criteria:

1.) Align with one or more of Pennsylvania Creative Industries' five key areas:

- Asset Development
- Workforce Development
- Community Development
- Visibility
- Policy

2.) Demonstrate statewide **or broad regional reach** and benefit.

3.) Demonstrate capacity to carry out project as proposed.

Creative Catalyst applications will be reviewed by Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff based on the review criteria included in this document. Recommendations will be presented to the Council, Pennsylvania Creative Industries' governing body. Submission of an application does not guarantee a recommendation or approval. Awards go to applications that demonstrate the highest degree of alignment and advancement of Pennsylvania Creative Industries' five key areas.

Council will act on recommendations during their [quarterly meetings](#) and has final authority in the awarding of grants. Applicants will be notified about the status of their proposals. Selected proposals will be notified via email with next steps outlining the grant award process.

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.



MEMO

DATE: March 13, 2026

TO: PCA Council Members

FROM: Sarah Merritt, Senior Director of Community Development

CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director

RE: Recommendations for Creative Districts Program Guidelines

MESSAGE:

At the October Council meeting, staff provided an initial overview of the proposed Creative Districts Program. Since then, Pennsylvania Creative Industries has completed the full draft of the 2027–2028 Creative Districts Program guidelines, which follow this memo.

Through our agency’s strategic planning process, we gained valuable insights into the needs of Pennsylvania’s creative sector. Community members, state agencies, organizations, artists and arts administrators, cross-sector professionals, and local government representatives shared perspectives on what is required for the creative industries to flourish. Beyond flexible funding for arts organizations, several priorities emerged, including community and cultural planning, expanded opportunities for rural communities, and strategies for retaining residents and attracting creative industries and visitors to Pennsylvania.

The program’s development has been shaped by in-depth research into national best practices, extensive review of research, resources, and insights from other state arts agencies, and valuable input from community development practitioners across the Commonwealth. This work ensured that the program reflects both proven strategies and the perspectives and experiences of Pennsylvania communities, grounding the program design in practical, community-centered approaches that respond directly to local needs.

The Creative Districts Program aligns with Pennsylvania Creative Industries' strategic priority to expand community development opportunities. It strengthens the visibility of the state's robust creative sector by providing communities with the opportunity to identify, elevate, and leverage their creative assets. Finally, the program supports the agency's policy focus by offering local officials and decision-makers with a tangible, actionable tool for integrating arts, culture, and creativity into long-term planning and community investment.

Key Considerations

Timeline:

- Letter of Intent Form Deadline: June 1, 2026
- Application Deadline: January 15, 2027
- Site Visits: February 2027
- Panel Review Period: March/April 2027
- Panel Convened: May/June 2027
- Council Approval: July 2027 Council Meeting

Eligibility:

- Interested organizations must submit a complete Letter of Intent Form
- Applicant organization must be a Pennsylvania-based 501(c)(3), 501(c)(6), or unit of local government.
- If the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) is not a municipality or a local entity that serves as the community and economic development organization, the district must include at least one partner that fulfills this role (see program guidelines for a full explanation).
- Fiscal agents or fiscal sponsors are not eligible. The applying organization must be the District Coordinating Organization, the legal entity responsible for district management, grant administration, and reporting.

Anticipated grant amount: Up to \$50,000 per year for 5 years.

Match requirement: 1:1 match is required (up to 50% can be in-kind; at least 10% of the match must come from local government).

Request

Staff requests Council's approval of the final 2027–2028 Creative Districts Program guidelines so that Pennsylvania Creative Industries may begin statewide promotion and prepare communities for the LOI and application process.



Pennsylvania Creative Industries

Powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

2027-2028

Creative Districts Program Guidelines

Letter of Intent Form Due: June 1, 2026, 5 PM EST

Application Opens: November 30, 2026

Application Closes: January 15, 2027, 5 PM EST

Performance period: July 1 to June 30 each year of the five-year designation period.

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

About the Creative Districts Program

What is a Creative District?

A Creative District is a walkable, geographically and municipally defined area that is characterized by a high concentration of cultural facilities, creative businesses and entrepreneurs, artists, and culture bearers. Creative districts promote and benefit from a community's unique assets, enhance residents' quality of life, and attract visitors, talent, and investment.

The Creative Districts Program supports communities in transforming walkable, culturally vibrant areas into centers of economic growth, local identity, and inclusive revitalization. By investing in creative assets, the program fosters entrepreneurship and small business development, retains and attracts talent and visitors, advances a community's development and revitalization goals, and strengthens long-term planning.

Program Features:

- **Grant Funding:** Access to support for activities including, but not limited to, activities that address key elements of the district such as district management, planning, promotion, programming, public art, community engagement, and creative organization or small-business development, attraction, and retention.
- **Statewide Promotion:** Inclusion in official, branded marketing campaigns that boost visibility and tourism.
- **Technical Assistance:** Guidance and tools to help assist with mapping, planning, and implementation.
- **Peer Learning and Networking Opportunities**
- **Recognition & Branding:** Formal designation that elevates local identity and community pride.

- Support for Planning, Evaluation & Sustainability: Resources and support to develop a 5-year action plan, with encouragement for continued reflection, progress tracking, and adaptive planning over time.
- 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.
- 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](#).

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for Creative District designation:

- Interested organizations must submit a completed Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA by Monday, June 1, 2026, by 5 PM EST.
- Applicant organization must be a Pennsylvania-based 501(c)(3), 501(c)(6), or unit of local government.
 - Nonprofit applicants must be registered as a Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Corporations and Charitable Organizations and be in compliance with all required annual report filings.
- If the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) is not a municipality or a local entity that serves as the community and economic development organization, the district must include at least one partner that fulfills this role. Eligible partners include a community development corporation; a municipal or county planning or community and economic development department; or a designated Main Street management organization, Business Improvement District (BID)/Downtown Improvement District (DID), Local Development District (LDD), or Redevelopment Authority, among others. This partnership must be documented through a Letter of Commitment submitted with the application, as outlined in the Letter of Commitment guidance provided with the Foundational Activities materials.
- Note: Fiscal agents or fiscal sponsors are not eligible. The applying organization must be the selected District Coordinating Organization, the legal entity responsible for District management, grant administration, and reporting.

Funding Amount

- Anticipated grant amounts are up to \$50,000 per year for 5 years.
- 1:1 match is required (up to 50% can be in-kind; at least 10% of the match must come from the local government).

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 that are 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.

Creative District Designation Process

To be eligible to apply for Creative District designation, a community must submit the Letter of Intent Form (LOI) by the stated deadline and participate in a pre-application meeting with PA Creative Industries staff. This initial meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss any existing local plans, answer questions, discuss community readiness and available resources and toolkits that can support the community's efforts.

Note: Some communities may have undertaken planning or other foundational activities prior to the launch of the Creative Districts program. Previously completed plans or related work **may be considered** and will be reviewed **on a case-by-case basis** to determine alignment with program goals and requirements.

Creative District Designation Step-By-Step

1. Explore Feasibility & Form an Advisory Committee

- Assemble a working group of local stakeholders and partners to ensure the exploration of a Creative District reflects community priorities and perspectives.
- If needed, use the Guiding Questions to structure early conversations.
- If the community decides to move forward toward designation, individuals from the working group can transition into a more permanent Advisory Committee to support ongoing district development.

2. Designate a District Coordinating Organization (DCO)

- Identify the organization that will serve as the District Coordinating Organization (DCO) if the proposed Creative District receives designation.
- The DCO will submit the Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA no later June 1, 2026, by 5PM and

3. Submit Letter of Intent Form

- An interested community begins by submitting a completed Letter of Intent Form (LOI) via ESA. Deadline: June 1, 2026, by 5 PM EST (Note: PA Creative Industries will not accept late submissions).
 - New to ESA? Register through Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED) grants management system: <https://grants.pa.gov/>.
 - Note: You must register for a Keystone Login in order to apply through the grants management system. Register here if you have not already: <https://keystonelogin.pa.gov/Account/Register>
 - Please note that the Commonwealth uses ACH to make grant payments. Register for ACH Authorization at the following link, if you have not already done so: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennvest/programs-and-services/financing/ach-authorization-change-form>
 - Read and comply with the checklist for applicants and grantees: [grants management checklist for applicants and grantees as of 7.17.25.pdf](#)

4. Connect with PA Creative Industries Staff

- After submitting the LOI, schedule a virtual pre-application meeting [with staff](#) to discuss the designation process and answer questions.
5. Conduct a Community Asset Mapping Project
 - Identify the community's assets in the areas defined in the Asset Mapping Guide.
 - Document both established strengths and emerging opportunities.
 6. Define the District Map and Boundaries
 - Establish clear, walkable geographic boundaries for the proposed Creative District.
 - Include the creative assets and other key community resources located within those boundaries.
 7. Develop a 5-Year Action Plan
 - Develop a 5-year Action Plan outlining goals, strategies, partnerships, and anticipated outcomes in the following areas – Management & Governance, Community Engagement & Partnerships, Creative Economy & Small Business Support, Placemaking & Programming, Branding & Marketing, and Sustainability & Resource Development.
 8. Complete and Submit the Foundational Activities Workbook/Application in ESA
 - Communities complete the required Foundational Activities and submit the finished Foundational Activities Workbook along with all required application materials via ESA.
 9. PA Creative Industries Staff Site Visit (If needed)
 - Agency staff may conduct a site visit to better understand the district's readiness and context.
 10. Panel Review & Recommendation
 - Panel reviews all applications and recommends proposed Creative Districts for designation to be approved to Council.
 11. Designation Begins
 - Official Creative District designations take effect July 1, 2027, pending passage of the state budget and Council approval.

Foundational Activities Overview

PA Creative Industries staff are available throughout the process to support communities as they complete the required Foundational Activities. Staff can talk through each step, review existing community work, and help you think through plans and possibilities. While guides, toolkits, and worksheets are provided to help communities move through each activity, you are not required to use these materials. If you prefer to use your own tools or locally developed resources, please discuss them with the Program Director before beginning the activities to ensure they meet the program's expectations. At the end of the process, communities will submit their completed Foundational Activities Workbook as part of the application.

Foundational Activities Tools

Advisory Committee:

- Advisory Committee Guide
- Advisory Committee Worksheet
- Advisory Committee Recruitment Flyer

Community Asset Mapping:

- Asset Mapping Guide
- Asset Mapping Worksheet
- Asset Mapping Inventory Form

Geographic Mapping:

- Geographic Mapping Guide
- Geographic Mapping Worksheet

District Coordinating Organization:

- District Administrator Organization Letter of Commitment Template
- District Partners Organization Memorandum of Understanding Template
- Local Government Resolution Template

District Action Plan:

- Action Plan Guide
- Action Plan Template

Foundational Activities Workbook

Glossary of Terms

Other Resources

Creative District Program Timeline

- Letter of Intent Form Deadline: June 1, 2026, by 5PM (see LOI Form submission instructions)
- Due date to submit applications with the Completed Foundational Activities Workbook: January 15, 2027, by 5 PM EST
- Site Visits: February 2027
- Panel Review Period: March/April 2027
- Panel Convenes: May/June 2027
- Council Approval: July 2027 Council Meeting

Required Application Materials

- Completed Foundational Activities Workbook.
- DCO Commitment Letter.
- Most recently completed audited financial statement, compilation, or review (including any management letters) (if applicable).
- Most recently submitted IRS Form 990 tax filing (if applicable).
- Letters of Support from at least three community partner organizations (nonprofit, business, local government). – should this elaborate on the partnerships and should they be required – should we indicate a required or optional from legislative
- A formally adopted local government resolution pledging support for the project and committing to provide at least 10% of the required match must be submitted with the application.

Application Review Process

- Proposals will be reviewed by a committee based on the review criteria below with considerations for geography and reach. Committee recommendations will be presented to the Council, Pennsylvania Creative Industries' governing body.

- Council will act on recommendations and has final authority in the awarding of grants. Applicants will be notified about the status of their proposals. Selected proposals will be notified via email with next steps outlining the grant award process.

Review Criteria:

Completion and Quality of Foundational Activities

- All required activities in the Foundational Activities Workbook are complete and clearly documented.
- The materials demonstrate an understanding of the Creative Districts program and a shared vision among partners.
- The selected District Coordinating Organization shows a stable track record and alignment with the proposed district's goals.

Community Engagement and Partner Commitment

- Documentation shows meaningful engagement with artists, cultural organizations, local government, businesses, and residents.
- Partners demonstrate clear support for the district's development and long-term vision.

Capacity of the District Coordinating Organization and Advisory Committee

- The District Coordinating Organization's Commitment Letter and financial documents demonstrate operational capacity to manage district activities, partnerships, and long-term planning.
- The District Coordinating Organization and Advisory Committee show the ability to steward a Creative District and administer any grant funds awarded.

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.

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

DRAFT



MEMO

DATE: February 24, 2026

TO: PCA Council Members

FROM: Sarah Merritt, Senior Director of Community Development

CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director

RE: Recommendation for Statewide Services -
Administration of Public-Private Partnership Projects

MESSAGE:

In 2025, supported by Council, Pennsylvania Creative Industries partnered with PECO and Team Pennsylvania to administer the *Powering the Arts* grant program, which supported projects that expanded audience access to arts and cultural experiences. The program drew 139 applications from organizations across Philadelphia, Montgomery, Delaware, Chester, and Bucks counties. 30 grants of \$5,000 were awarded, following a competitive review process.

This collaboration served as an important pilot for a new public-private partnership model, offering valuable insights into how a state agency, a statewide nonprofit, and a corporate partner can work together to strengthen the creative sector and broaden community access to the arts.

As we look ahead, Pennsylvania Creative Industries staff requests Council approve \$25,000 for the Team Pennsylvania Foundation (Team PA) to act as the administrator of these projects in 2026, enabling the PCA to fulfill the current strategic plan mandate to develop cross-sector partnerships.

Team PA, a statewide nonprofit co-chaired by the Governor and a private-sector leader, serves as the Commonwealth's trusted neutral broker and convener. The organization combines collaboration with strategic investment to accelerate Pennsylvania's economy and has a long history of supporting statewide economic development in partnership with state agencies. Team PA is well-positioned to administer private-sector contributions that advance the role of the creative sector in community and economic development efforts.



MEMO

DATE: March 13, 2026
TO: Council Members
FROM: Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce and Business Development
CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director
RE: Planned Updates to the 26-27 Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program

MESSAGE:

The Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) Program continues to be a forward-thinking and relevant program offering essential funding and business planning resources to creative entrepreneurs who operate a for-profit business. As the agency is in the planning stages for the seventh CEA grant cycle (FY 26-27), some strategic revisions are recommended, based on analysis of the program to-date and to ensure the program continues to evolve and meet the needs of our creative entrepreneurs statewide.

Staff is planning the following updates to the program design, for implementation with the 26-27 CEA grant cycle. These recommendations were developed in collaboration with Bridgeway Capital, the Council-approved Statewide Administrator for the CEA Program as of the 26-27 grant cycle. *Note: Additional information about each recommendation point follows on the next page.*

1. Focus funding distribution on entrepreneurs that are beyond the starting and experimentation stages of their business growth cycle.
2. Key focus will be on accelerating economic impact and sustainability.
3. Cohort business planning and resource focus will shift based on the needs of the entrepreneurs in different areas of their business growth outside of the needs of the starting and experimentation.
4. The program application will be open to both former and new applicants.

Save the Date: Announcement Event

On May 15, 2026, Pennsylvania Creative Industries and Bridgeway Capital will be hosting an

event to announce the selection of Bridgeway Capital as the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program Statewide Administrator, as well as the opening of the new grant cycle, which starts September 2026.

The event will be held at the FDP Studio Shop, in Pleasant Unity. The owner of the FDP Studio Shop is a participant in the Creative Business Loan Fund and is both the revenue size we are aiming to assist in the next iteration of the CEA Program and the type of impact maker we are aiming to highlight. The rural backdrop of this business is beautiful as well! Link to the website of the business below and more information to come:
fdpstudioshop.com/.

Additional Information on CEA Program Updates for FY 26–27:

1. Focus is on distribution of funds to more established businesses. For the first six years of the program, 2020–2026, about 75% of the grant funds went to businesses that were in the starting, experimenting or emerging phases of their entrepreneurship journey with 55% reporting no revenue or revenue under \$10,000 (IMS/BGL, February 2026). About \$1,000,000 of the \$1,600,000 in grant funds, coinciding with data in the IMS/BGL, were dispersed statewide to support individuals in these beginning stages (IMS/BGL, February 2026). In the upcoming version of the program, we are proposing shifting the focus to entrepreneurs that are more established and have already shown sustainability in their business model but could use some additional support to accelerate their business to the next level. Many of these creative entrepreneurs have both an online presence, with Pennsylvania based products and services reaching beyond the state, as well as a brick- and- mortar presence in their local main streets in the communities throughout Pennsylvania as both a retail presence and/or as manufacturers of product.

The needs and resources of entrepreneurs in this more middle tier stage of their journey are much different than the needs of entrepreneurs at the starting, experimenting and emerging part of the journey, in accordance with this feedback the program content through the cohort will be adjusted accordingly. In addition, it is thought that there will be businesses from the first few years of the program, about 42% that have sustained their businesses and will now be eligible for the next version of the program (IMS/BGL, February 2026).

2. One aspect that was largely missing from the first round of CEA was the focus on how we could more strongly see economic impact through the resources and funding for the businesses served. The focus will be on accepting applicants that are on track to accelerate and how the funds could be an investment in their business to truly activate. In summary, this is less about giving small funding amounts and some business planning resources and hope that their business succeeds, and more about making larger investments in businesses that are already established and with funding and different business resources that could really have a greater impact.

3. The business planning resources and cohort will shift focus based upon the needs of the entrepreneurs in the program as more established businesses. On February 17th, Bridgeway Capital hosted a brainstorming session with a focus group of creative entrepreneurs who met in Pittsburgh. Some of the feedback from that focus group included what topics should be discussed in the cohort groups in the program moving forward. Overwhelmingly, the focus group members shared that they do not need business plan content but could use more individualized consultation on their businesses and additionally need more opportunity to have connected conversations about solutions for real world business issues. Topics will be focused on how to utilize the funding to have the most impact in their business, understanding their contributions/relevancy in the ecosystem of creative industries and the creative economy, and peer to peer group discussions. Smaller gatherings can happen as a touch point on a regional level at two points in the program year.
4. Any CEA grantee from the past six years can apply for the program (if they otherwise meet the new criteria, submitted a final report, and are not part of the 25-26 grouping for the first round). In addition, new applicants are also welcome. The guidelines will set the ability to reapply every three years.



MEMO

DATE: March 16, 2026
TO: Council Members
FROM: Amanda Lovell, Senior Director, Workforce and Business Development
CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director
RE: Proposed Updates to the Eligibility for Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program, Beginning September 1, 2026

MESSAGE:

Staff recommends approval of the below, additional Applicant Eligibility requirements for the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) Program. These proposed Eligibility requirements are anticipated to go into effect starting with the launch of the CEA Program Grant Cycle in September 2026.

The requirements listed below are new or updated for the upcoming grant cycle. Additional eligibility requirements do exist but were previously approved by Council and are already in use with the program currently.

Proposed updates to eligibility are detailed below.

Applicants must:

- Be able to provide tax documentation verifying that they have been in business for at least one year.
- Be a creative entrepreneur (for purpose of this grant, please see the below definition of creative entrepreneur) operating a small business as a Sole Proprietorship, Limited Liability Company (LLC), Partnership (GP/LP/LLP), or Corporation (C or S). Note: Employees of an applicant creative business are not eligible to apply for and/or participate in the CEA Program on behalf of the owner and/or partner.

- Creative entrepreneurs are defined as businesses that design and produce original artistic or crafted outputs in the form of products and services. Creative entrepreneurs should have high authorship, and revenue should be primarily driven by creative work. Pennsylvania Creative Industries reserves the right to review all applicants to determine their level of creative entrepreneurship as it relates to this grant.
- Creative industries focus areas include:
 - 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
- For the new and updated 2026–2027 CEA Program grant opportunity, all past CEA Program grantees will be eligible to apply under the revised eligibility above. After the 2026–2027 CEA grant period, creative entrepreneurs will be eligible to apply for future CEA Program grant cycles in accordance with the rules outlined in the program guidelines.
- There are two tiers of grant funding within the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Program. Please see below eligible revenue ranges required to apply for this grant:
 - Growth Grant applicants must have documented revenue between \$10,000–\$2,000,000.
 - Impact Grant applicants must have documented revenue between \$50,000–\$2,000,000.
- Creative businesses awarded the Growth Grant will not be eligible for the Growth Grant for three years and/or grant cycles after being selected. They may apply for the Impact Grant in the following year and/or grant cycle.
- Creative businesses awarded the Impact Grant will not be eligible for the Impact Grant or Growth Grant for three years and/or grant cycles after being selected.



MEMO

DATE: March 17, 2026
TO: Council Members
FROM: Amy Gabriele, Chief Financial Officer
CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director
RE: Grants Program for Smaller Organizations and Programs

Staff requests authorization to develop a grants program for smaller creative (arts) organizations and programs that deliver arts services, arts products, and/or arts programs. This program would open for applications in fall 2026 and provide operating support grants to smaller arts organizations and arts programs with average annual revenue between \$10,000-\$100,000.

The program would operate on a calendar year performance period (January-December 2027). As the grant activity period for current Creative Sector Flex Fund (CSFF) recipients runs through the current calendar year, a fall 2026 application period would ensure continued support is available in 2027 for interested and eligible applicants.

With authorization, staff will present full program guidelines for Council to review and vote on at the July 2026 Council meeting.

We anticipate the program to include the following features:

- Flexible funding to support arts organizations or programs that deliver arts services, arts products, and/or arts programs.
- Grants are non-matching.
- One application per organization, per year, may be submitted.
- Funds will be equitably allocated in all regions of the Commonwealth to ensure comprehensive statewide coverage.
- Anticipated grant amounts will be \$4,000 per organization.
- 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.

Eligibility:

- Be a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation whose mission is to create, perform, present, promote or serve the creative (arts) sector (e.g., advertising, architecture, performing and visual arts, design, crafts, music, music, media and film production, publishing, and digital games, etc.) or be a solely arts-related program of a larger, eligible, nonprofit corporation or unit of government whose mission is not solely arts-related (e.g., charitable or community service organization).
- Have an average annual arts revenue of \$10,000 to \$100,000.
- Have a history of at least two years of consistent arts programming in Pennsylvania.
- 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).

Ineligible:

- 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.
- 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.



MEMO

DATE: March 17, 2026
TO: Council Members
FROM: Amy Gabriele, Chief Financial Officer
CC: Karl Blischke, Executive Director
RE: Draft Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget

MESSAGE:

The following spreadsheet shows a draft of the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget that will be acted upon at the July 2026 Council meeting.

Waiver balances from previous years will be approved for use by the Governor's Office of the Budget. This is usually done in August of every year.

There is a shift in the 2026-2027 draft budget presentation to reflect the new strategic plan and programs within it. It is organized by the five key areas in the strategic plan. A description of each program explains how the proposed budget amount will be used.

Pennsylvania Creative Industries Grants Budgets 2026-2027 DRAFT PROPOSAL		DESCRIPTION
REVENUE		
State	\$9,590,000	
Waiver Balances	\$214,007	Office of the Budget approval in August.
Revenue TOTAL	\$9,804,007	
EXPENSES		
Asset Development		
Asset Program	\$3,000,000	Supports small- to mid-sized creative (arts) organizations that deliver services, products, and/or programs.
Support for Smaller Orgs	\$1,000,000	Supports smaller creative (arts) organizations and programs that deliver services, products, and/or programs.
Capitalization	\$100,000	Supports financially healthy organizations that have a proven and marketable artistic product and/or service and are committed and poised to utilize contributed capital to scale up operations towards progressive growth.
Catalyst	\$500,000	Supports new initiatives and opportunities that advance strategies for empowering, connecting and amplifying creatives and creative industries and their contributions to communities, economy and workforce and have the potential for statewide or broad regional impact on the creative sector.
Industries Investment Fund	\$600,000	Supports the development of a public/private partnership fund for early stage, Pennsylvania-based, creative enterprises.
Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation	\$80,000	Provides Pennsylvania's access to programs and resources including grants, services, and technical assistance available only to Mid-Atlantic's nine partner states and jurisdictions.
TOTAL	\$5,280,000	
Workforce Development		
Business Loan Fund	\$250,000	Supports access to affordable and flexible financing for small, creative businesses.
Entrepreneur Accelerator	\$1,000,000	Supports creative entrepreneurs through small business consultation services, grant funding, and access to a curriculum of business strategies delivered through a cohort model of networking, learning, and participation.
Workforce & Career Education	\$500,000	Supports training and skill development programs, career pathway programs, and youth workforce development initiatives.
TOTAL	\$1,750,000	
Community Development		
Creative Communities	\$825,000	Provides multi-year funding to community-driven, arts-based projects that serve as catalysts for livability, economic development, and community connectedness.
Creative Districts	\$0	Supports communities in transforming walkable, culturally vibrant areas into centers of economic growth, local identity, and inclusive revitalization by investing in creative assets, fostering entrepreneurship, and small business development.
TOTAL	\$825,000	
Visibility		
Creative Industries Resource Centers	\$600,000	Supports regional organizations to lead efforts to strengthen and grow the creative economy in their respective area and to act as a central convener, connector, and catalyst for the creative industries ecosystem.
Innovation & Impact Grant	\$1,000,000	Supports new, multi-year strategies that empower, connect, and amplify creatives and creative industries, strengthening their contributions to communities, the economy, and the workforce while advancing innovation and increasing the sector's visibility.
Poetry Out Loud	\$75,000	Supports the statewide administration of POL, which is a national arts education program that encourages the study of poetry by offering free educational materials and a recitation competition for high school-aged students across the country through classroom, regional and state competitions.
TOTAL	\$1,675,000	
Policy		
Statewide Services	\$60,000	Supports research and related activities to inform future strategies, programs, and decision-making on the creative sector.
TOTAL	\$60,000	
Expenses TOTAL	\$9,590,000	
BALANCE	\$214,007	