

Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Timeline: 1966–2026

1966:

The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA) was established in 1966, when Governor William D. Scranton signed its enabling legislation, Act 538, into law on October 26.

At its founding, the PCA's primary purpose was to encourage and develop the arts throughout the Commonwealth. The legislation charged the Council with assessing how Pennsylvania's existing and potential artistic and cultural resources could best serve the cultural needs and aspirations of its residents. In practice, this meant the PCA was created to:

- Encourage and develop the arts across the state
- Identify and support cultural resources and activities that met community needs
- Serve as a foundation for public investment in the arts, including grant programs that launched in 1968

Act 538 also authorized the PCA to survey artistic and cultural assets, advise on arts-related policy, and foster broader public participation in the arts. Together, these responsibilities laid the groundwork for statewide arts support and long-term community engagement.

The legislation is notable for establishing one of the earliest state-level arts agencies in the United States with a public mission centered on cultural enrichment, rather than solely on economic outcomes.

1983-1996:

In 1983, the National Endowment for the Arts launched a new grant program to support state-run Apprenticeships in Traditional Arts. The PCA received one of the first grants, initiating a pilot project focused on craft traditions. In 1984 music was added to the program and in 1986 the program was fully funded by the PCA and managed in-house by PCA staff.

In 1985, the Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission (PHAC), created by executive order in 1980, established the State Office of Folklife Programs and assumed collaborative management of the apprenticeship program. The PCA oversaw the panel review process, while PHAC conducted site visits, documented partnerships, built an archive of funded artists (now housed in the PA Folklife Archive at Penn State Harrisburg), and produced public programming.

PHAC shuttered in 1996.

Early 1990s:

When programs were centrally administered in Harrisburg through the PCA, data showed that a disproportionate share of funding was concentrated in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. In response, the PCA began exploring strategies to distribute funding more equitably across the Commonwealth.

1994:

The PCA established its first partnership program with a focus on Arts in Education (AIE). Previously, schools and nonprofit organizations applied directly to the PCA for AIE funding and often waited a year or more to receive awards to support artist-in-residence programs.

To address these delays, the PCA piloted a partnership model with three organizations across the state, gathering feedback and impact data from those partners to help shape and refine the program. Participating organizations received a block of funding to administer Arts in Education–specific grants and programs within their respective regions.

1996:

With support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute for Cultural Partnerships, formed by former staff of the Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission, partnered with the PCA to launch the Folk Arts Infrastructure program.

The first initiative of its kind in the nation, the program became a model for other states, including New Jersey, Colorado, and Maryland. It later evolved into what became the Folk Arts Partnership.

The program supported local fieldwork across multiple regions of Pennsylvania, funding efforts through community-based organizations, such as the Philadelphia Folklore Project, as well as through contracts with folklorists working in underrepresented areas of the state.

1999:

The PA Partners in the Arts (PPA) Partnership was launched to further support equitable distribution of public dollars. Like the AIE partnership, it relied on partner organizations across the state to help administer the program within their local regions. Through this model, grant funds were distributed to support grassroots arts projects and programming led by nonprofit organizations, for-profit entities, and individual artists.

2002:

Building on the success of the Arts in Education (AIE) and PA Partners in the Arts (PPA) models, the PCA launched the Folk and Traditional Arts Partnership. This partnership works with regional organizations across the Commonwealth to administer grants and programming that support the preservation, transmission, and continued practice of folk and traditional art forms within local communities. As with the other partnerships, it significantly increased access to arts funding for largely underserved artists and communities around the state.

2008:

The PCA sunset its Fellowship Program, which had provided funding to artists demonstrating artistic excellence. Under the program's structure, visual artists applied in even-numbered years, while performing artists applied in odd-numbered years.

2010:

The Institute for Cultural Partnerships closed its doors and the Folk Arts Partnership work was shifted to Jump Street for a few years until it was eventually brought back in-house at the PCA.

2015:

The AIE program switched to the regional partnership model of fourteen divisions. Previously, there were six regions, with each covering up to 15 counties.

2018 and earlier:

Project Stream and Program Stream Grants served as the backbone of the PCA's community-based funding. These programs supported local arts projects, with artists, nonprofit organizations, and universities applying through regional partner organizations.

Organizations that received Program Stream Grants for three consecutive years became eligible for Arts Organizations and Arts Programs (AOAP) grants. AOAP provided general operating support to established arts nonprofits and programs that demonstrated sustained and consistent arts activity. Several small folk and traditional arts organizations and ensembles were able to gain traction and build their professional capacity through this process. Another important resource for small organizations was the Preserving Diverse Cultures program, which offered capacity building and professional development for arts organizations led by people of color.

2019:

The PCA developed the Creative Communities Program to support community-driven arts and placemaking projects. This new program was seen as complementary to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) existing tax credit program that supported eligible placemaking projects, the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP).

2020:

The Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator (CEA) Program was introduced as a new program of the PCA. Through this grant program, entrepreneurs who work within the creative industries (Marketing, Architecture, Visual Arts and Crafts, Design, Film and Media, Digital Games, Music and Entertainment, and Publishing) were eligible to receive \$2,000 in funding to support the launching or scaling of a for-profit micro business.

Project Stream Grants were sunset. Entry to Program Stream Grants were introduced to create pathways to Program Stream Grants.

2023:

The Creative Sector Flex Fund (CSFF) was introduced as a flexible grant program offering grant awards to small and mid-sized arts organizations and non-arts organizations with arts programming with annual revenues between \$10,000 - \$200,000.

Entry to Program Stream and Program Stream Grants were sunset.

2025:

PCA rebranded as Pennsylvania Creative Industries, powered by Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

PCI announced that FY 25-26 is the final year for regional partnerships and the programs they administer on behalf of PCI will either sunset or be administered directly by the PCI. The long-standing Apprenticeships in Traditional Arts grant program will be sunsetted in 2026. Preserving Diverse Cultures grants has also been removed.

PCI announced the Creative Assets grant. This grant will provide flexible operating support to organizations with annual budgets between \$100,000 - \$2,000,000.

2026:

PCI announced to existing PPA regional partners that Bridgeway Capital will serve as the future administrator of CEA.