



Board of Directors FAQs

Thank you for your interest in joining the Pennsylvania Humanities Council's Board of Directors! This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a committed team working to put the humanities into action to create positive change across Pennsylvania.

Here is basic information about what Pennsylvania Humanities Council requires from its board members. Please review this document to assess if board service with us is the right fit for you.

What does Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) do?

The Pennsylvania Humanities Council is an independent nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities and part of a network of 56 state humanities councils that spans the nation and U.S. jurisdictions.

We put the humanities in action to create positive change. We are passionate advocates, innovative program designers and strategic grantmakers. We lead a movement to champion and redefine the role the humanities play in our lives. We use the humanities to generate avenues for civic involvement and community development, and for youth and adults to strengthen skills for school, work and every day. You can learn more about PHC at pahumanities.org.

What is PHC's relationship with the NEH?

PHC is a Federal/State Partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The councils were established to fulfill the requirement in the agency's enabling legislation--National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965--as amended that the Endowment support humanities programs "in each of the several states."

The Partnership makes humanities education and lifelong learning readily available at the local level, tailored to local interests and needs and drawing upon local resources, traditions and heritage.

What is the composition of the Board?

The Board is comprised of 18 regular members elected by the Board, and up to 6 members appointed by the Governor.

Who is eligible to serve on the Board?

Board membership is limited to individuals who at the time of their election or appointment are either residents in Pennsylvania or employed full-time in Pennsylvania.

How long do you serve?

3 years. Elected to start November 1st. Board members may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms (i.e. 6 years). Members may be appointed by the Board to fill vacancies.

The term of a member appointed by the Governor of Pennsylvania terminates on October 31 (the end of PHC's Fiscal Year) following the expiration of the appointing Governor's term of office.

What are the fundraising expectations for Board members?

100% Board participation is a tangible demonstration of the Board's leadership and its commitment to the Pennsylvania Humanities Council: it is also required by many funders. Each PHC board member is expected to make a personal financial contribution during each year of their service.

A Board member's annual gift to PHC should be one of their top three contributions in a given year and at a level in line with their personal financial circumstances. The suggested minimum annual contribution is \$750, with the understanding that some members have the ability as well as the inclination to make a more generous contribution.

Other opportunities to give, like special fundraisers or campaigns, are optional and based on the Board member's interests and capacity to give.

All Board members are required to assist PHC staff with fundraising efforts -- from identifying prospects in your network to thanking donors for their gifts, and you will be provided with guidance on the best ways to collaborate with staff on these efforts.

How much time is required to serve?

We estimate a time commitment of 7-10 hours per month for board meetings, committee phone conferences, orientation sessions, and special events, including preparation time.

When and how often are Board and committee meetings?

The full Board meets at least 3 times per year, once each in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, when in person meeting is possible. The meetings are conducted during the day and may require arriving the night before. The meetings are the third Thursday

in October, February and May. If this schedule poses problems for you, please advise the Governance Committee.

Committees meet at least once between board meetings in order to establish annual priorities and accomplish certain tasks by established deadlines. Attendance, usually by phone or Zoom video conference, is essential for the committees to do their work.

Committees: Audit, Development, Executive, Finance, and Governance.

Are there any orientation or mentoring sessions for new members?

An orientation session will occur by Zoom or in person. The Governance Committee arranges other orientation sessions as needed on finance and other topics. Each new member is assigned a mentor Board member for the first year to introduce them to the Council and to answer questions.

What other service opportunities are there?

Government Relations Ad hoc Group: We work to deepen and expand relationships with advocacy partners and government to sustain, increase, and diversify our funding and partnerships. Core to our work is an annual cycle of advocacy activities corresponding with federal and state budget cycles. We schedule and/or attend meetings with legislators in DC and district offices. Present the PHC's case, when requested, to elected officials and other community leaders by writing letters and making personal visits and telephone calls.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Ad hoc Group: The Ad hoc Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Group shall guide the board and staff in the process of creating an equitable organization by developing a shared equity language and lens, utilizing the equity lens to develop policies and organizational procedures, and the development of equity measurements as approved in Pennsylvania Humanities Council's 2019-21 Strategic Plan.

Events Attendance: Attend at least one PHC related program, meeting, presentation, or event per year. This could include attending a story-gathering program at a Community Heart & Soul town, meeting with state agency staff about funding, presenting PHC's work to a local legislator, representing the PHC at a local awards ceremony -- and more.

What is the selection process?

After you complete an online application, it will be reviewed by the Governance Committee. Candidates who look to be a good fit will be contacted for an interview.

Upon recommendation by the Governance Committee, the candidate's name will be placed on the slate for election by the Board at an upcoming Board Meeting or by unanimous email vote.

Given the diverse needs of the board, many times we have more candidates than slots to fill. In that case, you may be put in the pipeline for future consideration or volunteer opportunities. Your name may be forwarded to the Governor's Office for recommendation for appointment too.

If elected, board members are invited to attend a transition meeting at the end of the fiscal year, to meet their fellow board members and learn about activities in the first year of their term.

What is the purpose of the Board and what is its approach to governance?

The purpose of our Board is to provide thoughtful leadership that advances PHC's strategic plan through your talent, service, advocacy, and ongoing financial contributions. We are energized volunteers who are passionate about PHC's mission and work collaboratively with other Board members, the Executive Director, and PHC staff.

We believe that the Board's role is to ensure that PHC establishes and maintains the trust of the community it serves by being clear and transparent in fulfilling our mission, prudent and ethical in its activities, and accountable for its actions. Our meetings focus on planning, policy-making, and assessing our progress.

As a member of the Federal/State Partnership, PHC is a good steward of NEH funds, spending public funds wisely, evaluating our impact, and communicating regularly with NEH, our partners and constituents. The Board carries out ongoing strategic planning through self-assessments, maintains strong governance and business practices, develops diversified funding, and controls risks by the provision of general liability insurance.

What is PHC's vision, mission, and work?

Vision

We believe the humanities inspire people to grow their potential and shape an equitable society.

Mission

We put the humanities in action to create positive change in our lives and communities.

Our Work

- Our work is grounded in people and champions their creativity and big ideas.
- We bring Pennsylvanians together to shape the future through the power of stories, reflection, and relationships. Our programs and grants generate avenues for civic involvement and community development, and for youth and adult learners to strengthen skills for school, work, and personal improvement.
- We amplify the voices of talented partners and individuals, and we lead a movement to champion and redefine the role the humanities play in our lives.

- We strategically focus our resources in two areas -- civic engagement and education -- where the need is great and where the humanities can have the deepest impact.

Who does PHC engage with and reach?

- We engage with people throughout Pennsylvania.
- We partner across sectors with nonprofits, educators, philanthropy, government, fellow advocates, business, and media.
- Every day we work with Pennsylvanians who are seeking positive change in their lives and communities.

What are PHC's strategic goals?

Advocacy and Leadership

Demonstrate why the humanities are a relevant tool for social change and personal growth.

Governance

Build a diverse board that is overseeing its growth and actively engaged in advancing the organization externally.

Education

Demonstrate the role the humanities play in the learning and growth of people in Pennsylvania communities.

Civic Engagement

Demonstrate how the humanities build stronger relationships, identify shared values, and drive civic action in Pennsylvania communities.

Fundraising

Build a sustainable fundraising program to ensure that PHC has the diverse financial resources necessary to advance its mission.

Financial Sustainability

Position PHC as a well-capitalized organization with the appropriate mix of resources to support its short- and long-term financial needs, to mitigate risk, and take advantage of opportunities.

Branding and Communications

Position PHC as a distinctive leader and as a pre-eminent resource in leveraging the humanities to create positive change in communities.

Building Collaboration and Infrastructure

Nurture a culture and strengthen the organization around our shared purpose, be a high performance staff committed to equity and collaboration, and advance the operational needs of the organization and its employees.

What are PHC's values?

People First

Change starts with relationships. We trust in the power of people from different walks of life to come together to make a difference.

Learning

Curiosity, imagination, critical thinking, and collaboration are the pathways to understanding, empathy, character, and engagement.

Innovation

Change can be risky, but complacency is riskier. We approach changing needs with openness and creativity.

Strategic Focus

We recognize that we can have the greatest impact if we are deliberate and disciplined.

Collaboration

Complicated issues can't be solved in isolation. We bring people together as partners to achieve greater impact.

Leadership

We lead alongside others and raise a strong voice to advocate for the humanities in Pennsylvania.

What are PHC's core programs?

Education

Teen Reading Lounge (TRL)- Operating at 19 libraries and out-of-school sites across the state for the 2019-20 program year, Teen Reading Lounge allows teens to take the lead by choosing readings on topics of interest, have honest discussions with their peers, and participate in teen-led community projects. TRL is in its 10th year and is the recipient of multiple awards including the after school champion award from the Pennsylvania After School Youth Development Network.

TRL also provides humanities-based training for librarians and youth development professionals at both current TRL sites and for our network of previous TRL site staff statewide. In 2020, we commissioned a research based evaluation report to document TRL's impact in its first 10 years. Teen Reading Lounge is supported with funds awarded by the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, the NEH and restricted donations from individual and business donors.

Civic Engagement

Pennsylvania Heart & Soul Communities— Heart & Soul is a community-led process that uses a humanities-based approach to empower new leaders and encourage positive change. In 2020, PHC worked with five existing communities (Williamsport, Meadville, Greater Carlisle, Upper Chichester, Cameron County) and launched the program in four new towns (Beaver Falls, Ambridge, Rochester and Dillsburg) using the power of stories to discover hidden voices and shared values, and develop meaningful action steps that inspire community and economic development.

Three communities used Heart & Soul principles to develop and construct public art projects that reflect their town's shared values. Heart & Soul activities are supported by our NEH grant, and are offered in partnership with the Orton Family Foundation that provides in-kind support and additional funding.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development is a collaborating partner in identifying appropriate communities for the program and continues to fund Cameron County and Upper Chichester as well as three communities in Beaver County. In 2020, we added two new partners: the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and South Mountain Partnership, who helped us fund grants to Dillsburg and supported some activities with the PA Route 6 alliance will bring four new Heart & Soul communities in 2021.

Chester Made uses the humanities to promote and celebrate local arts and their contributions to economic development. Local artists create, teach, and share their art with Chester residents through free residencies and projects benefiting the community. Projects range from mural painting and design, artistic rendering through free residencies and projects benefiting the community, artistic rendering on the grounds of an abandoned building, to video vignettes on the cultural history of Chester and panel discussions.

This year, PHC used funds from ember, a project of the Spring Point Foundation, to launch the Chester Digital Story Project and Chester Made website to document short stories from Chester residents about what makes Chester home. ember is providing two years of funding from April 2019 through March 2021.

Does PHC engage in any special projects?

PHC pursues opportunities to engage in additional projects that help us advance our mission in partnership with people, institutions and communities. These projects usually are realized through an interactive process between partners and participants.

2020 Examples

Reimaging Creative Engagement webinar series, developed in partnership with the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, offered strategies and tactics for community engagement skills to a cross sector of professionals representing libraries, community planners, educators, and non-profits. The three sessions focused on belonging, story sharing, and action steps and featured prominent national speakers.

CARES Act Funding

As part of the National Cares Act Relief Package, PHC received \$792,000 to distribute to 147 humanities organizations to assist with operations and programs during the pandemic. PHC recruited a panel of humanities professionals to review applications and make funding recommendations, and developed a grants management system to make the process transparent.

Pop-up Grants for Cultural Producers

In rapid response to the pandemic shutdowns, PHC created a pop-up grant opportunity to help humanities based organizations across the state to turn their in person programs into virtual events. The grant funded 47 organizations statewide, including libraries, historical societies, and museums.

Webinars

We collaborated with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA) on a series of informational webinars to help arts and humanities organizations with operational issues related to the pandemic shutdown. Topics covered included legalities and production pitfalls in producing virtual programs, and marketing to wider audiences. The webinars were offered at no cost and attracted several hundred attendees.