



Board of Directors FAQs

Thank you for your interest in joining the PA Humanities' 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 PA Humanities requires from its board members. Please review this document to assess if board service with us is the right fit for you.

What does PA Humanities do?

PA Humanities 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 believe the humanities inspire people to grow their potential and shape an equitable society. We put the humanities in action to create positive change in our lives and communities. 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. You can learn more about us at pahumanities.org.

What is our relationship with the NEH?

We are 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 our Fiscal Year) following the expiration of the appointing Governor's term.

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 PA Humanities: it is also required by many funders. Each board member is expected to make a personal financial contribution during each year of their service.

A Board member's annual gift to PA Humanities should be one of their top three contributions in a given year and at a level in line with their personal financial circumstances. 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 PA Humanities 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 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 on the third Thursday in October, February and May. If this schedule is a problem, 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 organization 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 our 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 PA Humanities' 2019-23 Strategic Plan.

Events Attendance: Attend at least one PA Humanities 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 our work to a local legislator, representing us 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 a 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 their first year.

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 our strategic plan through your talent, service, advocacy, and ongoing financial contributions. We are energized volunteers who are passionate about PA Humanities' mission and work collaboratively with other Board members, the Executive Director, and staff.

We are a diverse board that represents and advocates for equity and inclusiveness in PA Humanities' communities. We believe that the Board's role is to ensure that PA Humanities establishes caring relationships where everyone can thrive and belong 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, we are 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 PA Humanities' 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 PA Humanities 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 PA Humanities’ 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 we have the diverse financial resources necessary to advance its mission.

Financial Sustainability

Position PA Humanities 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 PA Humanities 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 PA Humanities' 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 PA Humanities' core programs?

Education

Teen Reading Lounge (TRL)- Operating at 17 libraries and out-of-school sites across the state for the 2021-22 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 youth-led community projects. TRL is in its 11th 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. A unique partnership with Community Heart & Soul (formerly the Orton Family Foundation), PA Humanities has worked collaboratively with state-wide partners to recruit, select, train and support residents, local government officials as well as arts, humanities and culture leaders across the state to discover what matters most to them and plan for the future of their communities.

In 2015, PA Humanities launched the pilot of Community Heart & Soul in three communities: Williamsport, Greater Carlisle and Meadville. Since then our network has expanded, adding 10 new communities through partnerships with Beaver County and the PA Route 6 Alliance. Our current communities are: Upper Chichester, Cameron County, Beaver Falls, Ambridge, Dillsburg, Youngsville, Tidioute, Carbondale and Wyoming County. In addition to our main funding partners, the NEH and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, Heart & Soul has been supported by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, South Mountain Partnership and other generous local funders.

Heart & Soul results in renewed pride in a community's identity and history, uncovers hidden narratives, reveals new local leaders and cultivates local economic growth and development.

Chester Made uses the humanities to promote and celebrate local arts and their contributions to economic development. With funds from ember, a project of the Spring Point Foundation, Chester Made has focused on amplifying voices through the Chester Digital Storytelling Project. Storytelling is, has been, and always will be the heart of the Chester Made project. Since its earliest days, Chester Made has used storytelling as a way to bring people together, address challenges, create solutions, and celebrate victories. The emergence of the Chester Digital Storytelling project builds on the strong history of PA Humanities' mission to find human connections in the humanities. The digital story process is a new way to honor the hopes, dreams, and memories of the extraordinary, everyday people in Chester.

Does PA Humanities engage in any special projects?

We pursue 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.

PA Kindness Poem

PA Humanities partnered with Philadelphia poet laureate Trapeta B. Mayson on a mission to help spread kindness throughout the state. Named the PA Kindness Poem Project, this year-long initiative invited residents to share messages on social media that promote generosity, healing, reconciliation, and peace. Drawing inspiration from those shared words, Mayson has created an original poem, “Kindness Lives Here,” and we released it on World Kindness Day 2021.

PA SHARP

PA SHARP is PA Humanities’ \$1.4 million humanities recovery and growth program that includes a mapping project, and documentary videos, podcasts, and publications on our learnings. As part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, state and regional humanities councils distributed funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities’ SHARP (Sustaining the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan) program. Through PA SHARP, PA Humanities is providing up to \$20,000 in flexible funding to support the growth and recovery of the humanities in Pennsylvania. The initiative is an opportunity to reimagine, reinvent, and re-envision humanities work through planning, capacity building, and creative programming. Of special note is PA Humanities’ development of a new learning network with grantees and a Humanities Mapping Project in partnership with Drexel University that will map, network, and celebrate the ecosystem of humanities practice across multiple sectors in PA and their role in Pennsylvania’s recovery over the next year and a half.

If You Were in The Room

Imagine if the concept “nothing about us, without us” were true about the US Constitution. PA Humanities is asking young adults to reimagine the Constitution and win tickets to see *Hamilton the Musical* on Broadway. In honor of the upcoming 250th anniversary of this historic document, PA Humanities is inviting residents aged 16-22 to consider the Constitution and its impact on their life and community, and create a video, drawing, photograph or poem about what you would change if you could write the Constitution today. With the help of NPR-affiliate WHYY, selected submissions also will be included in a short film and contest winners participate in an in-person and/or virtual screening. This youth civic education project supported through NEH’s A More Perfect Union initiative will provide multiple opportunities for young people to share through discussion and social media about their vision for a Constitution that reflects our present moment, including how they would seek consensus, overcome challenges, and lay the foundation for a more equitable future.

Leading Edge Fellowship

PA Humanities is partnering with Dr. Brittany Levingston, one of the 41 newest Leading Edge Fellows, who will develop a series of statewide programs centered on the renowned works of Pennsylvania playwright August Wilson. Levingston’s work will focus on the ten plays of August Wilson’s Century Cycle, which chronicles the collective memory, history, and dreams of African American families across the twentieth century. She will collaborate with PA Humanities on a slate of community engagement programs exploring themes from the plays in conjunction with the rich history of African American communities across the state.

Research Publications

In 2021-2022, PA Humanities will disseminate a series of independent research studies, including a national study, on its core programs: PA Heart & Soul, Chester Made, and Teen Reading Lounge. Researchers include Elizabeth Myrick & Associates Consulting, PennPraxis, and Dr. Valerie Adams-Bass. Also scheduled for release are articles in a Modern Language Association volume and The Foundation Review.