



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 composed 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. A Governor's appointee may be elected for one regular term not exceeding three years following the end of their 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, with at least one in person – either in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, or Pittsburgh. 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 June. 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.

Strategic Planning Ad hoc Group: The Ad hoc Strategic Planning Group shall guide the board and staff in the planning process in collaboration with an outside consultant. The planning will set directions, goals, strategies, tactics, and metrics for 2024-2027 that affirm the organization's core purpose and build on a decade of learning and growth, a recent rebranding, and a new equity framework.

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 PA 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

Operating at libraries and out-of-school sites across the state, Teen Reading Lounge allows youth 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 has been operating for over a decade 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.

In 2022, PA Humanities launched the Youth-Led Humanities cohort, a pilot program aimed at creating sustainable youth-led humanities programming and engagement, with the goal of building welcoming, affirming and inclusive spaces through training, professional development opportunities and peer learning.

Civic Engagement

PA Heart & Soul is a resident-led process that uses storytelling to spark positive changes within a community and empower new leaders. 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.

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.

Does PA Humanities engage in any special projects?

We frequently pursue opportunities to engage in additional projects that help us advance our mission.

50th Anniversary

2023-2024 marks 50 years of bringing Pennsylvanians together to make meaningful change through the humanities. From our humble beginnings in 1973, we've worked side-by-side with everyday people to build connections and foster transformative conversations within communities. Today we continue that tradition with an expanded commitment to equity, advocacy, research, and impact as we look to revolutionize the way people think about, and engage with, the humanities. To celebrate 50 years of innovation, we've launched an exciting series of new programs and projects aimed at honoring the people of Pennsylvania and their stories, traditions, and talents.

Rain Poetry

PA Humanities is engaging children from five Philadelphia neighborhoods in a hands-on community poetry activity facilitated by local poets and Youth Poets Laureate. Haiku created by students grades 1-5 are being installed in public spaces by Tiny WPA with a special rain-activated solution. They are inspired by the theme, "What helps you keep growing?" All it takes is a splash of water for the poems to sprout up all around as if by magic. Rain Poetry transforms everyday spaces into opportunities to engage with the humanities — and fosters learning, conversation, and community stewardship along the way.

Voices of History

As part of its 50th anniversary celebration, PA Humanities is launching a first-of-its-kind statewide initiative to collect and celebrate the stories, family histories, struggles, and triumphs of Black Pennsylvanians from the 20th and 21st centuries. This signature project will connect historic black communities in six PA cities: Philadelphia, Erie, Pittsburgh, Scranton, State College, and York. These stories from everyday Black people about their lives, their fears, and their hopes challenge narratives that mythologize America's origins.

PA SHARP

PA SHARP is PA Humanities' \$1.4 million humanities recovery and growth grant program that includes a learning network, research mapping project, 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 for projects that ran through 2022. With this support, PA Humanities offered up to \$16,000 in flexible funding to organizations to support the growth and recovery of the humanities in Pennsylvania.

Research

We believe in contributing our learnings to the larger conversation about the role of the humanities in creating lasting change. We put participatory research at the forefront of all our work and partner with scholars, consultants, and a cross-sector of leaders including University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, Elizabeth Myrick + Associates, and Allegheny Intermediate Unit. Recent surveys and research publications include the PA Humanities Discovery Project, Humanities in Action: A National Perspective, PA CultureCheck, Humanities-Based Community Development in Pennsylvania: Insights from PHC's Heart & Soul Project, and Teen Reading Lounge: Insights from 10 Years of Participatory Research and Evaluation. More info at PAHumanities.org/research.