



# CultureCheck

PENNSYLVANIA  
STATEWIDE FINDINGS



# CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	1
WHO PARTICIPATED?	3
ATTENDANCE	4
OPERATIONS	6
COMMUNITY IMPACT	8
CALL TO ACTION	11
PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS	12
2023/2024 PA CULTURECHECK MAP	16
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	17



# CultureCheck

## PENNSYLVANIA STATEWIDE FINDINGS

[PAHumanities.org/CultureCheck](https://PAHumanities.org/CultureCheck)

### It's our story, let's tell it!

PA CultureCheck is a study by PA Humanities and the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance to gather the voices of Pennsylvania's cultural, arts, and humanities organizations, along with other nonprofits and community groups. The two primary goals were to **continue tracking the post-pandemic recovery and regrowth** and to **look deeper at the many ways organizations are engaging with their communities**. The results inform local and statewide advocacy efforts, educate grantmakers and practitioners about the latest trends, inspire future research, and help build a stronger and more responsive cultural community.

Now in its second year and expanded to include virtual listening sessions, the results of PA CultureCheck reveal that the cultural sector is still feeling the effects of the pandemic but continues to be a powerful asset to economic development with many opportunities for growth. The future of this sector lies not in its past, but how we move forward from here.

PA CultureCheck in the news: [WHYY/PBS](#), [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), [Philadelphia Citizen](#), [Axios Philadelphia](#), [Artblog](#)

### Research Timeline

- **May & June 2023**  
Survey conducted
- **July - August 2023**  
Data analysis
- **August - September 2023**  
Preliminary data to key stakeholders
- **October 17 & 18 2023**  
Listening Sessions
- **November 1, 2023**  
Presentation to PA Arts & Humanities Statewide Convening
- **December 2023**  
Incorporate community feedback
- **February 2024**  
Final report release

## Data highlights

- **271 survey responses** from all areas of the state, with responses reflecting the geographic and demographic diversity of Pennsylvania
- **Attendance approximately 20% down** from 2019, with varying degrees of impact across organization type; performing arts organizations especially affected
- **Operations returning to normal but hiring and volunteer participation especially challenging**, with 59% of organizations reporting hiring difficulties
- **Cultural organizations are embedded in communities** - 96% partner with community organizations, addressing issues like education (72%), access and inclusion (58%), community development (33%), and mental health and wellness (29%)
- During listening sessions, **organizations reported seeking innovative ways to work and interact with audiences**. New challenges like inflation and audience members commuting to work/downtown less frequently have arisen.

## What We Learned

- **The arts and humanities community is expansive and diverse**, including many different kinds of organizations with unique assets and interests.
- **Collectively, they drive innovation and growth** in our communities and economies.
- **Increased funding and support from businesses, philanthropy, governments, and the media is essential** to reflect our art and humanities community's significant economic contribution and national prominence.
- **Our sector amplifies our community's unique cultural identity and functions as powerful connectors** by building bridges, lifting missing voices, and maintaining crucial partnerships in an often divided state.
- **Now is the time for cultural workers to redefine our moment** and to discover new ways to grow audiences, engage on a deeper level, and develop new partnerships.

*"Pennsylvania's cultural organizations are centers of innovation, creativity, learning, and progress. If we work collectively we can leverage our talents and experience to grow ourselves, our communities, and our economies with heart and soul."*

- Laurie Zierer, executive director, PA Humanities

*"A healthy creative sector has a profound ripple effect in communities and economies across the state. This data illustrates that fact, but it also highlights the far-reaching potential that could be gained by working in collaboration with the allied industries and individuals who benefit from the positive impact of arts and culture."*

- Patricia Wilson Aden, President and CEO, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance

## WHO PARTICIPATED?

Various organizations from communities of all sizes across the state participated in PA CultureCheck. In total, the results and sample size of the organizations are representative of Pennsylvania's culture sector. In addition to the survey, in fall 2023 we held two listening sessions of arts and cultural community members (many of whom had completed the survey) to hear additional feedback and input on this study: one held with arts and culture leaders and workers from across the state, and one held specifically focusing on Southeastern PA.

- **271** participating organizations from across Pennsylvania
- **22%** more organizations participated than in 2022
- **74%** having an annual budget under \$1.5 million. The responses received across the geographic regions of Pennsylvania were consistent with population sizes
- **23%** rural organizations and **18%** BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) organizations, both close to the state's demographic makeup

### Takeaway

PA CultureCheck illustrates the expansiveness and diversity of Pennsylvania's cultural sector. Its vital work touches and inspires our communities and grows our economies in many ways, such as through historical sites, zoos, arts centers, and libraries. During our listening sessions, cultural workers were eager to connect with each other and share their experiences and learnings. This shows the need for increasing opportunities for regional and statewide collaboration. Data on the sector from PA CultureCheck and other sources is vital for making informed, strategic decisions.

### Participating Organizations by Type:



### Organization Type

Libraries & Archives	69
Historical Museums & Societies	45
Art, Science, & Other Museums	25
Performing Arts	53
Community & Education	43
Service, Support, & Other	28
Media	8

51% (139) of all participating organizations are Museums, Historical Organizations, and Libraries.

## ATTENDANCE

Many organizations continue to regain audiences but uncertainty remains about the “new normal” and what the future holds. Some areas of the sector have seen unique shifts and patterns of growth, with performing arts and museums adapting and building in different ways and rates.

- Sector-wide the median organization still reports an approximately **20% decline** in attendance compared to 2019
- These effects are not evenly distributed -- performing arts organizations are more affected, with **only 23%** report having fully regained attendance, compared to 45% of museums and historical organizations
- **36%** of organizations report that their attendance is “back to or above 2019 levels,” compared with 11% in the 2022 survey
- **25%** of respondents replied that they are unsure when attendance might fully recover
- During listening sessions, organizations, especially in the performing arts, noted that much of the recovery of attendees comes from single ticket buyers, with subscriber levels not recovering, possibly accelerating a trend away from subscribers occurring over the last few decades
- During listening sessions, organizations adapted programming and identified new audiences during the pandemic as work habits and locations changed; they are seeking ways to keep those gains while bringing back past audiences and events

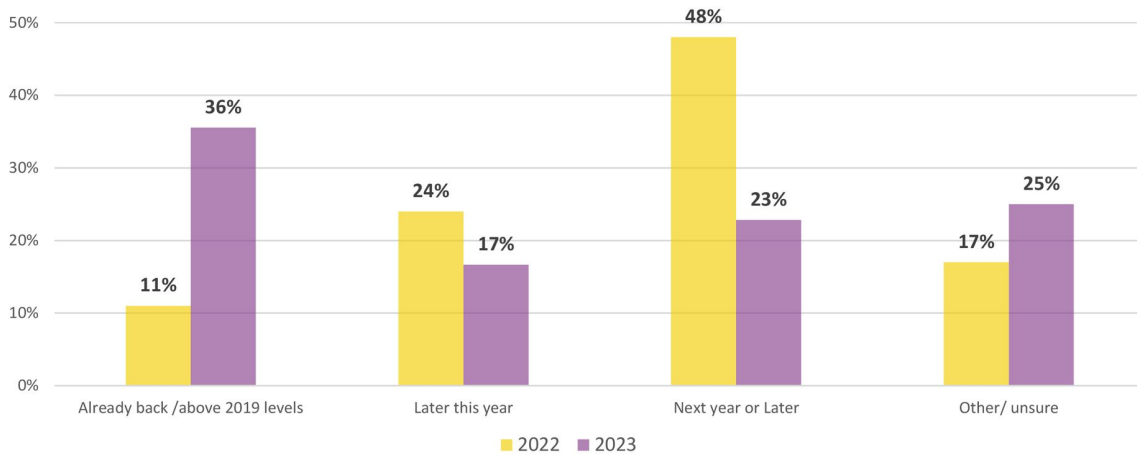
### Takeaway

Pennsylvania's resilient cultural sector is working to innovatively navigate the aftermath of the pandemic and new inflationary pressures. Some organizations have reached or surpassed their pre-pandemic attendance levels, but the path to a full recovery is complex and multifaceted. This period of transformation is characterized by adaptive strategies and necessary adjustments. For example, the performing arts are now attracting more single ticket buyers instead of subscribers, indicating a shift from traditional models. Across the cultural sector, organizations are responding to changing audience behaviors and preferences against the backdrop of a challenging financial landscape. The sector's ability to continue thriving hinges on greater overall support from the public, philanthropy, business, government, and media while recognizing the unique challenges and recovery paths of different cultural organizations.

*“I know we always try to compare our attendance data from 2019, but I think at this point it's like a whole new world when it comes to attendance data...”*

- Alexis Furlong, Independence Seaport Museum

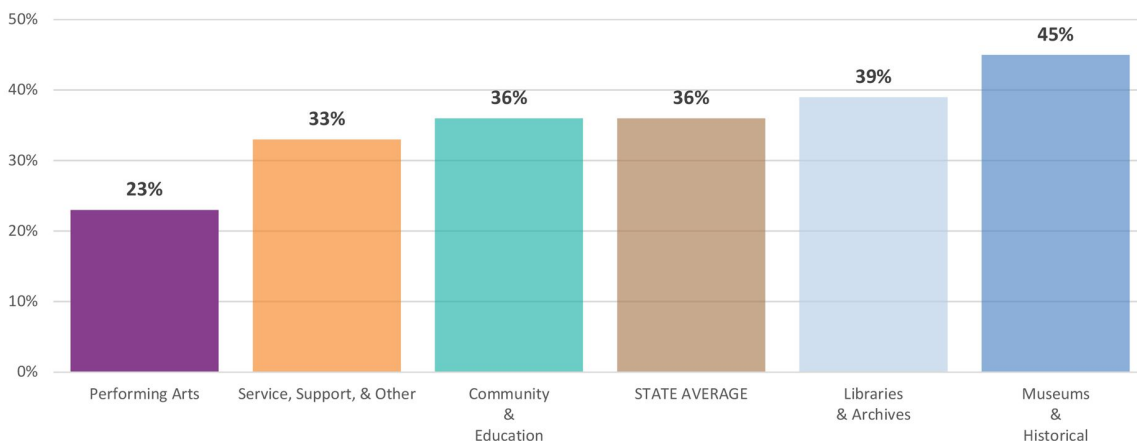
**“When do you expect attendance to return to 2019 levels?”  
Results compared: 2022 to 2023**



*“About 70% of our audience, pre-pandemic, were subscribers. So being down 20% there, which is probably our new normal, is significant. [Also,] overall expenses are so much higher.”*

- Theater Professional

**Percentage of Organizations with Attendance Back to/Above 2019 Levels  
By organization type**



Historical Museums & Societies and Art, Science, & Other Museums are combined here as Museums & Historical.  
Media organizations not shown; no significant in-person attendance reported.

## OPERATIONS

Top concerns are the ability to gain or retain attendance, encourage community participation, and hire new staff. While we heard in the listening sessions that organizations are working to innovate and develop new business models and ways of working, they are now grappling with inflation and new costs of doing business with fewer volunteers and staff.

- Only **23%** of organizations report that their programs are operating at reduced capacity, compared with 33% of organizations in 2022
- **59%** of organizations report difficulty in hiring
- **46%** of organizations report a reduced number of volunteers. This effect is not evenly distributed -- a larger percentage of libraries (55%) report a reduction compared to a lower percentage of performing art organizations (30%)
- During the listening sessions, a frequent comment was that, over the last year, organizations have faced increased inflationary pressures
- Gaining/retaining attendance and community participation is a top concern according to polls in the listening session and the sector is looking for ways to collaborate on promotion and develop relations with the media, business, and local government to rebrand their community's assets

### Takeaway

Cultural workers need space, time, and capital to innovate. In light of the evolving landscape, operations within the sector must be agile and forward-thinking. Organizations are called upon to balance innovation with sustainable practices to ensure resilience in the face of economic and societal shifts. Hiring and volunteer recruitment are persistent issues and are taking a toll on an already stretched sector and cultural workers' well being. Embracing collaboration, diversification of staffing and audiences, and finding new ways to engage volunteers to build capacity will be key in maintaining relevance and impact. There is a need for stronger media collaboration and partnerships with business and local government to aid in community and economic development, as well as promotional efforts. Organizations find themselves needing to be more flexible and innovative in their operational strategies, such as building new marketing for single-ticket buyers or scaling back on the number of productions.

*“We were seeing a nice return to more of a normal pattern before inflation really took off. And when that hit, that also kind of was that second whammy that came around.”*

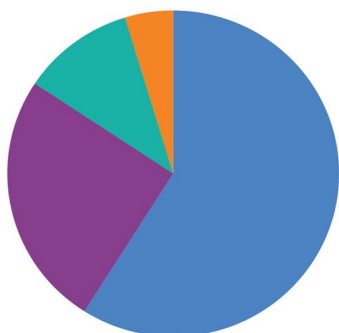
- Listening Session Participant

*“Unless you have a lot of money, you don't make it in the newspaper... I think everybody has a crisis in promotion.”*

- Listening Session Participant



## How Has Hiring Been?



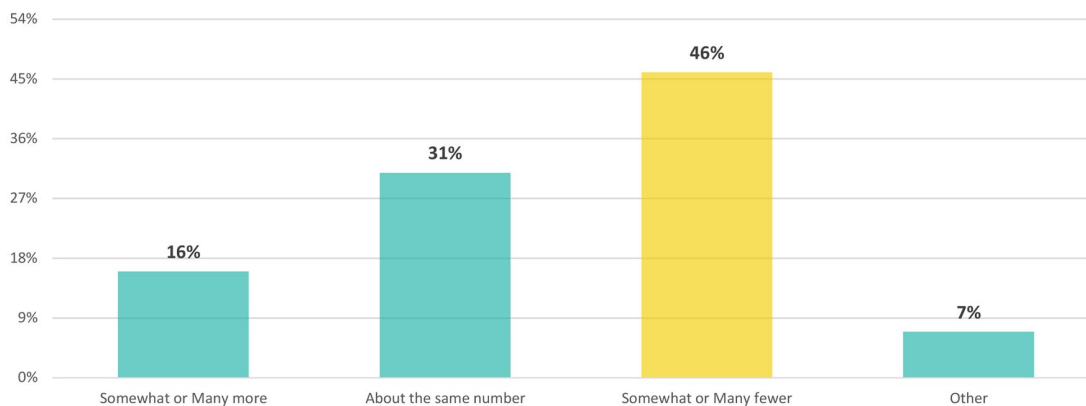
### How has hiring been?

Somewhat or very difficult	59%
Neutral/ about the same as always	25%
Somewhat or very easy	11%
Other	5%

*"We don't even have a newspaper out in our little rural community."*

- Theater Professional

## "How many volunteers at your organization compared to 2019?"



*"I think inflation has had a huge impact on us, just paying our people, keeping the doors open, paying the electric bill, paying the natural gas bill. It's great that we have volunteers, it's great that we have these programs, but if we can't keep the doors open, what are we going to do?"*

- Theater Professional

## Listening Session: What Are Your Biggest Challenges Right Now?\*



Attendance and  
Community Participation



Funding and  
Donations



Capacity and  
Hiring Staff

\* Results of combined instant polls conducted during the live listening sessions over Zoom

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Cultural organizations are engaged with and addressing the needs of their communities in many ways, such as supporting job training, youth education, and health and wellness. Their audiences are diverse and often include immigrants, veterans, unhoused, incarcerated, and victims of gun violence. Arts and culture workers bridge gaps, forge connections, and form meaningful partnerships, particularly in challenging times.

- Cultural organizations are embedded in communities - **96%** partner with community organizations, addressing issues like education (72%), access and inclusion (58%), community development (33%), and mental health and wellness (29%)
- Many work with students in multiple locations: **72%** of organizations work with students on school premises and **81%** of organizations work with students in the organizations' facilities
- **One third** of cultural organizations (33%) directly engage in economic development activities
- During the listening sessions, it was reported that building community identity and pride are integral to the role of cultural institutions. The contributions to a sense of place and community cohesion was highlighted, especially in terms of engaging new residents and reflecting the diversity of the community
- Discussions also highlighted the importance of uplifting diverse voices and stories and focused on the role of cultural institutions in promoting diversity and inclusion within their communities

### Takeaway

The cultural sector actively addresses social and educational issues while helping to grow thriving, economically vibrant communities. Cultural work plays a key role in areas such as neighborhood revitalization, youth engagement, public safety, and health and wellness. In challenging times, the sector is instrumental in amplifying underrepresented voices, leading with equity, and creating inclusive spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging. Organizations note the need to re-engage with local communities and attract new, more diverse audiences, with a greater emphasis on inclusivity and broadening the reach of cultural activities. By providing opportunities to connect and learn while helping to fuel our economy, the cultural sector contributes to the health, well-being, and support of our recovering communities. This is also critical for shaping social cohesion, cultural identity, and civic vitality. However, the economic and creative assets and potential that the sector brings to revitalizing our communities are underutilized and under-recognized.

*“One of our values is community... every show we produce has at least three to five [social and community] nonprofits... with which we connect... So for every show and what its themes are, there is a way of lifting up their missions to our audience”*

- Listening Session Participant

*"In the pandemic, we saw a pretty big community change...[We worked to] best engage with and capture our new audience members that might not know who we are, what we do, and just tried to welcome them into our organization."*

- Museum Professional

### Local Impact

96%

of organizations partner with community organizations,  
an increase of 9% from previous year

74%

of organizations partner with schools,  
an increase of 8% from previous year

55%

of organizations partner with Parks/Rec Centers,  
an increase of 8% from previous year

*"I'm hearing even from elected officials about how the arts and culture are our opportunity to re-engage our downtown. I'm seeing arts organizations do a really excellent job using arts as an opportunity to uplift diverse groups of voices. I just feel like that is exploding here..."*

- Listening Session Participant

### Listening Session: Community impact of your work?\*

71%

Educational & Cultural  
Opportunities

51%

Uplifting Diverse  
Voices & Stories

40%

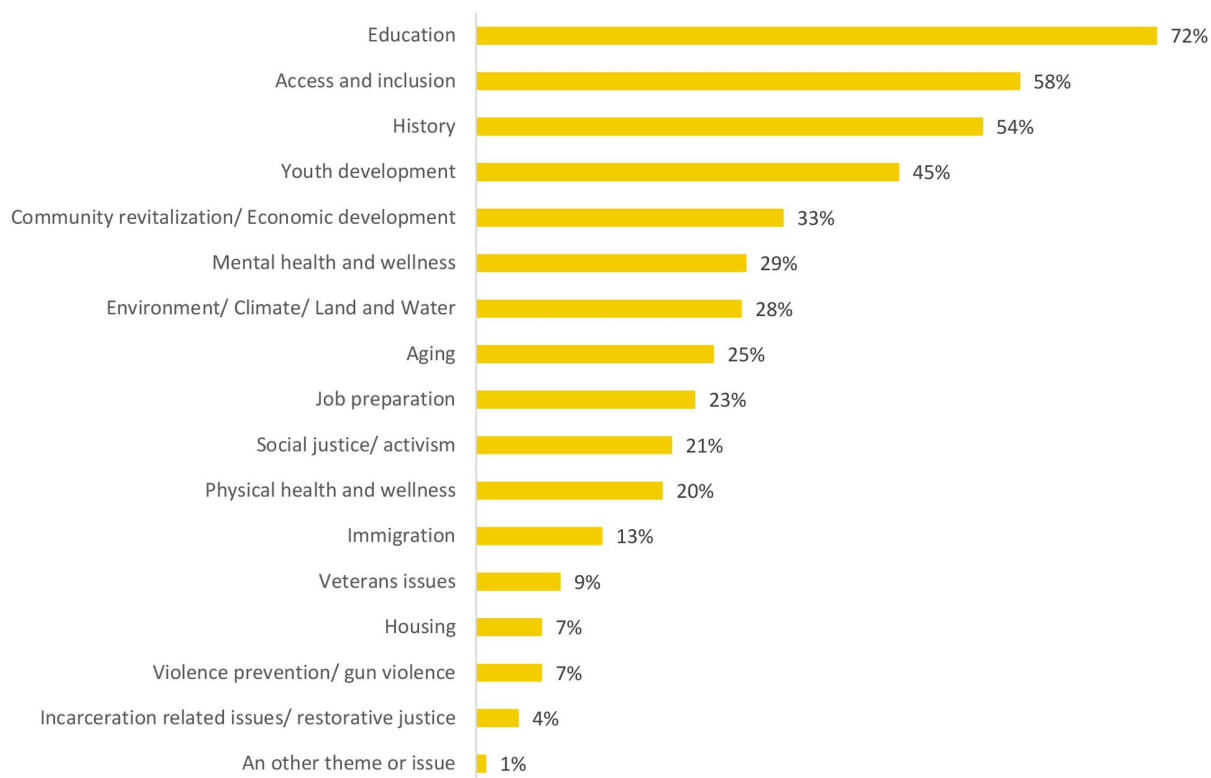
Economic  
Development

31%

Building Identity  
& Local Pride

\* Results of combined instant polls conducted during the live listening sessions over Zoom

## Which social issues does your organization address in its work?



*“We ARE the second responders in our town. Our participants are everyone. ...Our resources are free, or very low cost. And we are the only digital connection that many people have....”*

- Library Professional

## CALL TO ACTION

PA CultureCheck emphasizes the resilience, adaptability, and innovation of Pennsylvania's cultural sector -- but also the need for continued support. Here are three ways you can help:

- **Advocate:** Show your support for the cultural sector by contacting your elected officials to encourage additional funding, policies, and support for cultural initiatives. Request supportive policies, increased recognition, and greater allocation of funding.
- **Engage:** When possible, contribute financially to cultural organizations, artists, and projects. Offer your time and skills to assist in activities and events, including board membership roles.
- **Promote:** Contact media organizations and ask for greater coverage of the cultural sector. Through your own networks, amplify local events and share information about the sector's significant role in community enrichment, economic development, education, and well-being.

*“I think I don't believe in normal. I think the world is different. I don't think the world is ever going to go back to 2019. So I think that's a big challenge. It's just setting new benchmarks.”*

- Listening Session Participant

*“We need to redefine and study the actual economic contribution that we make in making a much more livable place. We are not getting the credit we deserve for creating a really decent place to live.”*

- Listening Session Participant

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

### Art, Science, & Other Museums

Armstrong Trails  
 Barnes Foundation  
 Carnegie Institute, DBA  
 "Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh"  
 Carnegie Science Center  
 Da Vinci Art Alliance  
 Demuth Foundation  
 Discovery Space of Central PA  
 Donna Weckerly Photography, LLC  
 Ely Molloy Studio  
 Everhart Museum of Natural History,  
 Science & Art  
 The Franklin Institute  
 The Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design  
 Goodell Gardens & Homestead  
 James E. Brewton Foundation  
 Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens  
 Lancaster Science Factory  
 Lehigh University Art Galleries  
 Lewisburg Children's Museum  
 Longwood Gardens  
 Penn Museum and GPADC  
 Philadelphia Sketch Club  
 Philadelphia's Magic Gardens  
 Pittsburgh Watercolor Society  
 River Art Works  
 The Temple Judea Museum

### Historical Museums & Societies

American Philosophical Society  
 Anthracite Heritage Museum and Iron Furnaces  
 Assoc inc  
 Beaver County Historical Research and  
 Landmarks Foundation  
 Berks County Historical Society  
 Bucks County Historical Society (Mercer  
 Museum and Fonthill Castle)  
 Chester County History Center  
 Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation

The Conococheague Institute for the  
 Study of Cultural Heritage  
 Dallastown Area Historical Society  
 Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site  
 Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion, Inc.  
 Fayette County Cultural Trust  
 Fulton County Historical Society  
 Historic Fallsington, Inc.  
 Historic Germantown  
 Historic Harrisburg Association  
 Historic RittenhouseTown Inc  
 The History Center on Main Street  
 Hornby School Restoration Society  
 Huntingdon County Historical Society  
 Independence Seaport Museum  
 Lackawanna Historical Society  
 Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum  
 Monroe County Historical Association  
 Moravian Historical Society  
 Mt. Tabor Preservation Project  
 Museum of the American Revolution  
 National Canal Museum  
 The National Civil War Museum  
 National Constitution Center  
 National Museum of Industrial History  
 Newlin Grist Mill  
 North Hills Genealogists (of Pittsburgh)  
 Pennsylvania Postal History Society  
 Pennypacker Mills  
 Philadelphia Archaeological Forum  
 Preservation Pennsylvania  
 Punxsutawney Area Historical &  
 Genealogical Society  
 Quiet Valley Living Historical Farm  
 Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center  
 Senator John Heinz History Center  
 Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of  
 Maxo Vanka  
 Titusville Historical Society  
 Wyck Association  
 Ye Olde Sulphur Spa Historical Society

## Libraries and Archives

Adams County Library System  
 Allentown Public Library  
 Altoona Area Public Library  
 Atglen Public Library  
 The Athenæum of Philadelphia  
 Avon Grove Library  
 Baden Memorial Library  
 Benson Memorial Library  
 Bethlehem Area Public Library  
 Bethlehem Area Public Library  
     South Side Branch  
 Bosler Memorial Library  
 Braddock Carnegie Library Association  
 Bradford Area Public Library  
 Brandywine Community Library  
 Cheltenham Township Library System  
 Coatesville Area Public Library  
 Cooper-Siegel Community Library  
 Cranberry Public Library  
 Cumberland County Library System Foundation  
 Degenstein Community Library  
 Delaware County Libraries  
 Donora Public Library  
 Eastern Monroe Public Library  
 Erie County Public Library  
 Folcroft Public library  
 Franklin County Library System  
 Free Library of Springfield Township  
 Hamlin Community Library  
 Hazleton Area Public Library  
 Helen Kate Furness Free Library  
 Hershey Public Library  
 Hollidaysburg Area Public Library  
 Indian Valley Public Library  
 James V. Brown Library  
 Jenkintown Library  
 Johnsonburg Public Library  
 Johnstown District Libraries  
 Knox Public Library  
 Kreutz Creek Library  
 Lansdowne Public Library  
 Library System of Lancaster County  
 Lower Merion Library System  
 Martinsburg Community Library  
 Middletown Free Library  
 Montgomery County Library District  
 Mount Jewett Memorial Library  
 Newport Public Library  
 Newtown Public Library  
 North Wales Area Library  
 Osterhout Free Library  
 Pennsylvania Integrated Library System  
 Pennsylvania State Library  
 Public Library for Union County  
 Punxsutawney Memorial Library  
 S.W. Smith Memorial Public Library  
 Schlow Centre Region Library  
 Scranton Public Library  
 Sharon Hill Public Library  
 Spalding Memorial Library  
 Springfield Township Library  
 Stone Memorial Library  
 Strasburg-Heisler Library  
 Sugar Grove Free Library Association  
 Swarthmore Public Library  
 Union Library of Hatboro  
 Upper Darby Township & Sellers Memorial  
     Free Public Library  
 Upper Moreland Free Public Library  
 William Jeanes Memorial Library  
 Zelienople Area Public Library

## Performing Arts

Altoona Community Theatre  
 Anna Crusis Feminist Choir  
 Appell Center for the Performing Arts  
 Arden Theatre Company  
 Aurora Classical of Culture Trust  
     Greater Philadelphia  
 The Catholic Choral Society of Scranton  
 Chamber Music Society of Bethlehem  
 City Theatre Company  
 Dearly Departed Players/  
     Dunmore Cemetery Tour  
 Enchantment Theatre Company  
 Farm Arts Collective Inc

Footlight Players Youth Theatre, and IUP  
 Theater-by-the-Grove  
 FringeArts  
 Grounded Theatre Company  
 Harmony Theater, Inc.  
 Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra  
 IceHouse Performing Arts Collaborative  
 Inis Nua Theatre Company  
 InterAct Theatre Company  
 Julie Esty/Dunmore Cemetery Tour/  
 Dearly Departed Players  
 Just Be You Performing Arts  
 Kelly Strayhorn Theater  
 Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers  
 La Fiocco  
 Lantern Theater Company  
 Lenape Chamber Ensemble  
 LiveConnections.org DBA World Cafe Live  
 The Lyric Consort  
 Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia  
 Mt. Airy Barn Dance  
 Network for New Music  
 Nittany Performing Arts Centre  
 Pasquerilla Performing Arts Center  
 Patricia Masarachia  
 The Pennsylvania Ballet Association DBA  
 Philadelphia Ballet  
 Performing Arts Traditions  
 Philadelphia Dance Company  
 Philadelphia Freedom Band  
 The Philadelphia Thing  
 PlayPenn  
 Riverfront Theater Company  
 Scranton Jazz Festival  
 Scranton Shakespeare Festival  
 Singing City  
 Theatre Exile  
 Theatre Horizon  
 Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestras  
 Tuesday Noon Recital Series  
 VoxAmaDeus  
 Wally Gordon Community Singers  
 Walnut Street Theatre  
 Wilma Theater  
 Zoellner Arts Center

## Community & Education

3 Dots Downtown  
 Abington Art Center  
 Art Expression Inc.  
 AustinBurkeArt.com  
 Caribbean Community in Philadelphia  
 Circle Legacy Center  
 Círculo Juvenil de Cultura  
 Claire Marcus FineArts  
 The Clay Studio  
 The Commonwealth Monument Project  
 Community Arts Center  
 Conflu.Creative Arts Center  
 Curtis Institute of Music  
 The Exchange  
 First Person Arts, Inc.  
 The Forwardian Arts Society  
 Franklin & Marshall College -  
 Dept. of Spanish and Linguistics  
 Georgia E. Gregory Interdenominational  
 School of Music  
 Hill Dance Academy Theatre  
 King's College  
 Kutztown University  
 The Learning Lamp  
 LIGHT Education Initiative  
 Marywood University  
 Music for Veterans  
 The New Cumberland Collective  
 Northampton Community College  
 Northampton Community College -  
 Monroe Campus  
 Northeast Bradford Jr./ Sr. High School  
 Ollin Yoliztli Calmecac  
 Ophelia's Making Agency  
 Oxford Arts Alliance  
 Penn Area Library  
 Pickleberry Pie  
 Play On Philly  
 Porter Loves  
 Project Capoeira  
 Scranton Cultural Center at Masonic Temple  
 Titusville Council on the Arts  
 Ukrainian Homestead of CEC, ODWU, Inc.



University of Pittsburgh  
 University of Pittsburgh Department of  
 Theatre Arts  
 University of Pittsburgh Johnstown

### **Service, Support, & Other**

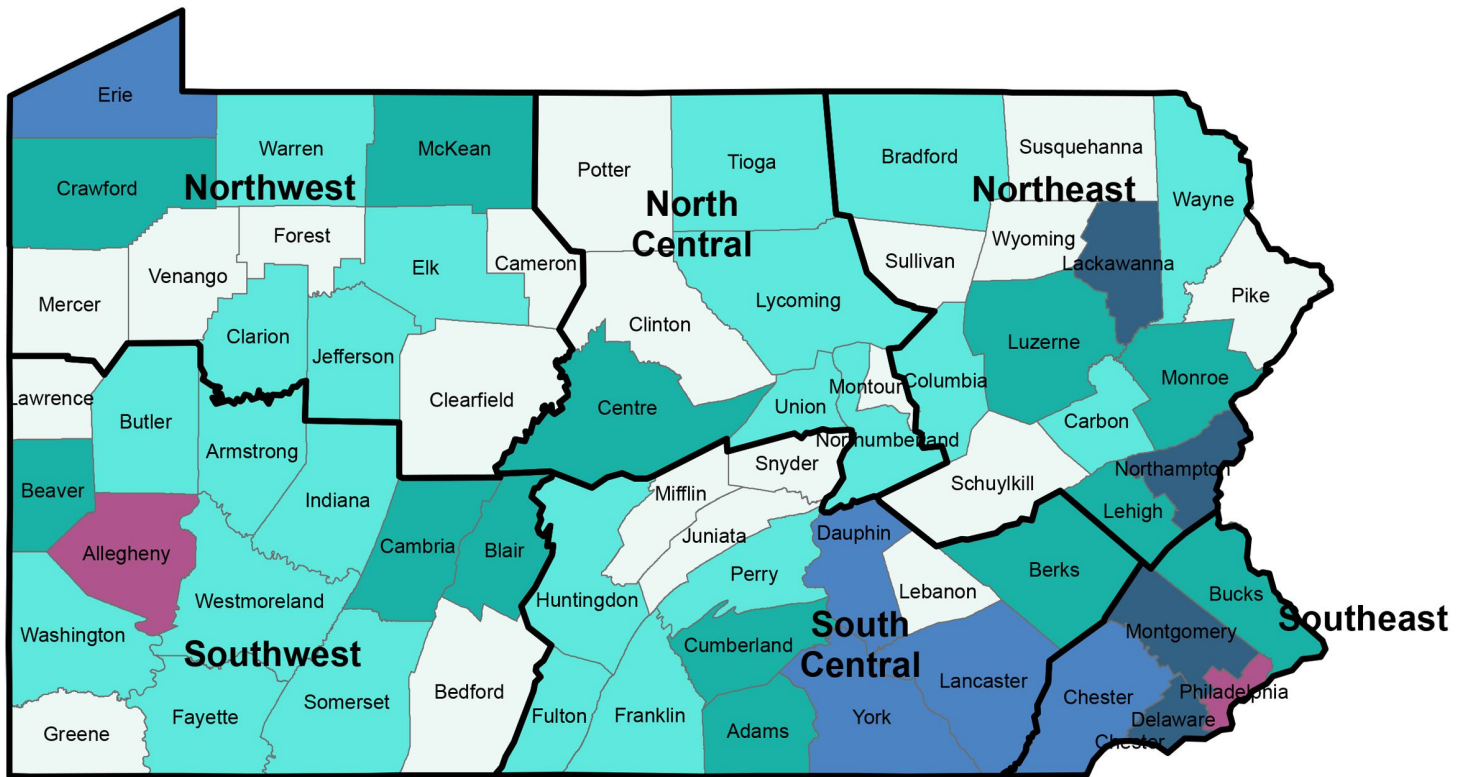
Adams County Arts Council  
 Allegheny National Forest Visitors Bureau  
 Barrio Alegria  
 BuildaBridge International  
 Centre County Planning and  
 Community Development  
 Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts  
 Corry Area Chamber of Commerce  
 Erie Arts & Culture  
 Erie Yesterday  
 Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance  
 Greater Philadelphia Film Office  
 Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council  
 H-CAN (Havertown Community Action  
 Network) Arts Advocacy (ArtSquad)  
 Hope Station Opportunity Area  
 Neighborhood Council  
 Jess McPherson Arts & Consulting  
 Keep Music Alive  
 Lackawanna County Arts and  
 Culture Department  
 The Lehigh Art Alliance  
 PA Humanities  
 PennDOT  
 Pennsylvania Rural Arts Alliance  
 Pennsylvania Senate Library  
 Philadelphia Scenic Works  
 Philadelphia Sculptors  
 Sisters of St. Joseph  
 South Central PaARTners at Millersville  
 Theatre Philadelphia  
 Travelers Aid International PHL Airport

### **Media**

Broad Street Review  
 Bryn Mawr Film Institute  
 CMPRadio.Net  
 G-Town Radio  
 Historical Dream  
 History Making Productions LLC  
 Second State Press  
 Upstart Arts

# 2023/2024 PA CULTURECHECK MAP

## 2023 PA CultureCheck Participating Organizations by County



**PA Humanities Regions**

Region boundaries

**Participating Organizations**

**Number per County**

- no responses
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-9
- 10-19
- 20+

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all our PA CultureCheck participants!

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PA CultureCheck is made possible by financial support from people like you. Join the movement — donate to PA Humanities today!

For questions about PA CultureCheck, please contact Nick Crosson:  
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FOR THE  
HUMANITIES

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