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NEWS RELEASE

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage Announces \$8.6 Million in Grants and Appoints New Executive Director

*44 new awards will support artists and organizations in 2026;
Christina Vassallo to take the helm in January*

PHILADELPHIA (Dec. 8, 2025)—The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage (the Center) announced today that it has awarded \$8.6 million to 44 Philadelphia-area cultural organizations and artists. The grants support new theater productions, concerts, public art installations, historical exhibitions, and other engaging events—including six projects that will reflect on America’s 250th anniversary in 2026. Included in the total is \$1 million in unrestricted fellowships for 12 local artists working in the visual arts, performance, film, food, and other creative disciplines. (See below for details on the grants, including what’s new this year.)

Additionally, the Center [has appointed Christina Vassallo](#) as its new executive director, effective January 5, after an extensive search following Paula Marincola’s announcement this summer that she was stepping down in October.

As the former executive director of Philadelphia’s Fabric Workshop and Museum, and most recently the Alice & Harris Weston Director of the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati, Vassallo brings more than 15 years of dynamic and visionary leadership experience to the Center. In her new role, she will lead the development, evolution, and implementation of the Center’s grantmaking and community-building strategy, working with staff to enhance the visibility of grantees and deepen connections across the Philadelphia region’s cultural sector.

Vassallo has served at the CAC since March 2023, leading a strategic planning process that established new institutional priorities centered on community engagement, organizational sustainability, the museum’s local and global connections, and a new artistic vision to guide the organization into its 90th anniversary. She makes her return to Greater Philadelphia where she oversaw an ambitious slate of residencies and exhibitions at the Fabric Workshop from 2020 to 2023.

“What draws me to The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage is its dual identity as both a grantmaker and a hub for ideas, championing ambitious initiatives while investing in the long-term strength of the region’s cultural ecosystem,” Vassallo said. “I’m inspired by the Center’s commitment to empowering artists and

organizations to contribute meaningfully to Philadelphia’s vibrant and diverse arts community. I’m excited to help shape the next chapter of cultural investment in a city and region I know well and have missed deeply.”

Donna Frisby-Greenwood, the senior vice president leading Philadelphia work for The Pew Charitable Trusts (the Center’s primary funder), said of Vassallo’s appointment: “Christina is a strategic leader with a proven track record of strengthening nonprofits; engaging stakeholders; managing complex partnerships; developing timely, impactful programs; and understanding Philadelphia’s cultural community—all of which are critical to the Center’s role in an evolving creative sector. We are thrilled to have her steward the Center’s grantmaking and partnership with the Barnes Foundation.”

Regarding the Center’s grantees, Frisby-Greenwood added: “As we celebrate this year’s funded artists and projects, I’m excited that residents and visitors will enjoy meaningful experiences that showcase our region’s vitality as we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States—and Philadelphia’s role as the birthplace of modern democracy.”

The Center’s 2025 Grants

Twenty-eight local arts and heritage organizations have been awarded creative project grants to present a range of timely and compelling events and programs that will enliven public spaces ranging from cafes and historic sites to traditional museum and theater venues.

This year, eligibility was extended to fiscally sponsored organizations for the first time, and grants have been awarded to two: History Making Productions, a documentary film and video production studio, and We Are the Seeds, which celebrates and educates about contemporary Indigenous arts and cultures.

Also new in 2025, the Center expanded its “Evolving Futures” grants to include planning grants for organizations to research and develop new business models and revenue strategies. These planning grants provide important capital to support sustainable and successful futures for cultural institutions. Four organizations have been awarded funding in this category: EgoPo Classic Theater; The Fabric Workshop and Museum; Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia; and South Asian American Digital Archive.

Below is a partial list of organizations and artists receiving 2025 awards, along with the subjects and issues they will address. A full list of grantees and funded projects is available at pewcenterarts.org/2025grants.

Creative Projects and Public Programs

This year’s creative project grants to cultural institutions range from \$80,000 to \$300,000, plus an additional 20% in general operating support, bringing the maximum award to \$360,000.

Philadelphia Perspectives on America's 250th

- **Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History** will tell the rarely heard story of 18th-century American Jewish experiences during the American Revolution, offering new insight into the Declaration of Independence and the country's pursuit of religious liberty.
- **History Making Productions** will release a ten-part documentary taking a deep dive into the history of American democratic life through the lens of Philadelphia. The series will be broadcast in partnership with 6abc and shown at community screenings across the region.
- **WXPN** will commission 12 original anthems reflecting on the concept of independence from an array of nationally established and emerging Philadelphia musicians. The songs will be showcased during a concert series and released on vinyl.
- **Orchestra 2001** will interpret important constitutional amendments through a series of contemporary classical music concerts. Both new commissions and existing works from thirty American composers—including several based in Philadelphia—will explore issues such as freedom of speech and the abolition of slavery.

Theater, Dance, and Opera Premieres

- **Arden Theatre Company** will work with Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright James Ijames to develop a new stage adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's landmark 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a story about community, resilience, and transformation.
- **Philadelphia Theatre Company** will explore themes of belonging, migration, and the search for home in a new bilingual musical by Alba Martínez. The story is framed around an eye-opening ride on SEPTA's 47 bus taken by a Puerto Rican girl new to Philadelphia.
- **The Philadelphia Orchestra** will team up with visual artist Alex Da Corte to stage a multimedia opera based on Marisol Escobar's 1965 sculptural installation *The Party*. The work comes to life through surreal, stop-motion animation backed by the orchestra and a cast of singers.
- **Institute on Disabilities at Temple University** will collaborate with Kinetic Light, a disability-centered arts ensemble, to produce a dance piece that represents significant moments in disability advocacy and culture. Focusing on accessibility, the performance will include captions, ASL interpretation, haptic vibration, and multiple styles of audio description for choreography and sound.

Focus On Musical Innovators

- **African American Museum in Philadelphia** will present a multi-sensory exhibition, led by musician, DJ, and educator King Britt, celebrating Black innovators in electronic music. Installations, interactive workshops, and performances will tell the stories of these artists who shaped global culture.
- **PHILADANCO** will celebrate its five-decade legacy by teaming up with another long-running institution, Philadelphia International Records, to present four ballets set to Philly Soul classics from the Gamble and Huff catalog.

- **Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra** will spotlight Black women composers of contemporary orchestral music through a series of concerts and panel discussions, along with a companion podcast.

Pew Fellowships in the Arts

Supporting artists since 1992, the Pew Fellowships in the Arts program nurtures local artistic talent through 12 annual, unrestricted grants. This year's fellowships total \$1 million to support a dozen Philadelphia-area artists, each receiving \$85,000 in unrestricted funds. Beyond the monetary award, each fellowship includes professional advancement resources such as financial counseling, workshops, and opportunities to participate in artist residency programs. This year's Pew Fellows in the Arts work in literature, visual art, performance, music, film, and food. Among them are:

- **Emma Copley Eisenberg**, a writer of fiction and nonfiction, and author of the 2024 national indie bestseller *Housemates*, whose work explores themes of gender, race, and class.
- **John E. Dowell Jr.**, a visual artist whose six-decade body of work captures the pulse of America's cities and agricultural landscapes through painting, photography, printmaking, and multimedia pieces.
- **Nathalie Joachim**, a composer and performer (and current composer-in-residence at Opera Philadelphia) who draws from both Haitian folkloric influences and Western classical music.
- **Omar Tate**, a visual artist and chef, and owner of the restaurant Honeysuckle, who integrates curated culinary experiences and contemporary visual art with a focus on cultural preservation of the African diaspora.

See a full list of grantees and funded projects at pewcenterarts.org/2025grants.

About The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage is a multidisciplinary grantmaker and hub for knowledge-sharing dedicated to fostering a vibrant and diverse cultural community in Greater Philadelphia. The Center invests in ambitious, imaginative, and catalytic work that showcases the region's cultural vitality and enhances public life, and it engages in an exchange of ideas concerning artistic and interpretive practice with a broad network of cultural practitioners and leaders. Established in 2005, the Center is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and operated in partnership with the Barnes Foundation. For more information, visit pewcenterarts.org.