

NEWSLETTER | MAY 2026



GRANT AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS

2025-26 Advancement of Music

In February, the Foundation awarded \$1.52 million in Advancement of Music grants to 171 Greater Philadelphia organizations, including 23 first-time recipients and 65 organizations operating with budgets under \$100,000.

Many of this year's recipients are creating new programs to mark the U.S. Semiquincentennial. The Foundation's flexible general operating support allows organizations to develop this type of work, whether they are performing and presenting groups activating local stages or music education organizations serving students throughout the region. Consistent, unrestricted funding continues to be vital for the region's musical ecosystem.

The Foundation is proud to support these organizations making a difference in their communities and marking this historical moment. Learn more in the [news release](#).

2025-26 New Capital Support Grantees

This year's Capital Support cycle awarded \$976,500 to 24 music organizations across the Greater Philadelphia area, with \$611,500 distributed this fiscal year. Capital Support projects include the construction of new facilities, the renovation or expansion of existing facilities, and organizations' equipment, technology, hardware, and software needs as they create innovative, uplifting, and diverse music programming.

These capital projects tell a story about what it takes to sustain a thriving musical community. Organizations are building and expanding recording studios to give youth opportunities to produce their own music and provide emerging artists professional-quality access. Others are supporting mobile music labs bringing programming to Title I schools, updating sound systems for consistent performance quality, protecting performance spaces with critical infrastructure repairs, creating outdoor community venues, and expanding rehearsal spaces. Behind the scenes, organizations are consolidating digital archives,

modernizing aging infrastructure, and adopting tools that help small teams operate more sustainably. Learn more in this [news release](#).

EVENTS

Next Movement: Research on Barriers to Music Access Reflection

What does it take to break down barriers to music access?

With this question in mind, 50 grantees and trustees joined us in March for a Next Movement Idea Forum to discuss what barriers keep students, audiences, and musicians from accessing music.

Drawing on research and 168 grantee surveys, we explored five primary barriers and heard grantees share solutions already in action - from Chamber Music Lehigh Valley bringing Curtis and Juilliard musicians to libraries, to Community Music School Lehigh Valley & Berks launching sensory-friendly performances, to the Delaware Symphony distributing complimentary tickets to social service organizations and students.

One truth emerged: barrier removal is not free and never finished. Every effort requires resources and commitment that organizations make again and again.

Read the [full summary](#), and check out the playlist of music below that helped get presenters and participants through the winter.

Nidia Gongora's Pacifica Maravilla | Schumann's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major | Tristan und Isolde at the Met | Jac Ross' A Change is Gonna Come | Piazzolla's The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires | Cameron Winter's Love Takes Miles | Paul Simon covers (especially American Tune) | Zara Larsson | Shostakovich 5th Symphony | Leonard Bernstein West Side Story (America arrangement by Volterra Project Trio) | Stereophonic | M. Roger Holland's Lord Make Me an Instrument | Soil and Seed Project's For the Tired and Alone | Porgy and Bess | Irish Stream on Folk Alley | The Saw Doctors' Green and Red of Mayo | Olivia Dean | Aretha Franklin | Celine Dion | St. Matthew Passion, Bach | Stevie Wonder | Ooh, Child by The Five Steps (Nina Simone's cover, too) | Dakha Brakha from Ukraine | Anna Moffo's Chi il bel sogno di Doretta from Puccini's La Rondine | Kings Singers' You Are the New Day | Encanto Soundtrack | Orchestral and Choral music | Sesame Street | Joby Talbot's Path of Miracles | Thelonious Monk | John Coltrane | Hold On by Heidi Wilson (written for MN) | Suff's Musical Soundtrack | Hugh Masekela's Grazing in the Grass

Next Movement: Fall 2026

The next Next Movement convening of the year will occur this fall. More information and a registration link will be shared via social media and on our website soon. To learn more about Next Movement, check out [the website](#).

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

2025-26 Undergraduate Scholar Award Spotlight



Theodore Presser's personal pursuit of a music education, and later his work as a music educator, inspired him to dedicate a portion of his philanthropy to supporting music students. A century after his passing, this tradition continues in two award programs.

In its 2025-26 Undergraduate Scholar Award cycle, the Foundation named 264 exceptional music students nationwide as recipients, investing in them to accelerate the development of the next generation of musicians. Each Presser Scholar receives \$3,000 in recognition of their outstanding achievements in musical and academic performance, leadership and service, and contributions to building inclusive communities.

One of the exceptional students receiving the award is Pete Garcia, a music performance major from Northern Arizona University.

Pete combines exceptional artistry with academic rigor. A recipient of multiple prestigious awards, he has excelled in both scholarship and performance. His operatic résumé includes principal roles in *Don Giovanni*, *Susannah*, and *Die Fledermaus*, as well as engagements with professional companies and international training programs. Beyond performance, Pete's academic leadership shines through his Navajo Art Song Project, which collaborates with renowned composers to create art songs in Navajo. His dual mastery as a singer and collaborative pianist, coupled with his research innovation, reflects a rare blend of talent and intellectual depth.

Pete leads by serving. On the Navajo Reservation, he directs and accompanies choirs, preserving hymn traditions and teaching theory and language to younger generations.

Recognizing barriers to access, he organizes annual operatic recitals for rural communities, bringing classical music to audiences far from major venues. His mentorship of peers creates a culture of shared growth. Pete's leadership is defined by vision and action: empowering others while expanding access to music.

As an Indigenous and queer artist, Pete also uses performance to amplify underrepresented voices, including programming Navajo-inspired works and wearing traditional attire to affirm cultural identity. He challenges gender norms in stage dress, encouraging authenticity and self-expression. Through outreach recitals and advocacy, Pete ensures classical music is accessible and welcoming. His presence inspires BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students to see themselves in this art form. For Pete, inclusivity is not symbolic - it is lived practice, transforming classical spaces into communities where diversity thrives.

2024-25 Capital Supports Projects Recap

Last year, 22 music organizations received Capital Support grants totaling nearly \$1.1 million, with \$634,120 to be distributed in 2025 and the rest in subsequent years via multi-year commitments.

From ensuring ADA accessibility and safer facilities to upgrading technology and performance spaces, these investments enable organizations to better serve their communities through music education and performance. We recognize that behind every upgraded lighting system, new riser, or renovated space is an opportunity to remove barriers to musical excellence and broaden participation.

[Read](#) about five organizations (Allentown Symphony Association, Museum of Music Technology, WXPB, Community Music School (Trappe), and Highmark Mann Center), their projects, and what they accomplished.

NEWS & INFORMATION

CultureWorks Greater Philadelphia

Looking for professional development and networking opportunities with other artists? Check out [CultureWorks Greater Philadelphia](#), an organization that provides management resources for those who create, preserve, and cultivate culture

In addition to their fiscal sponsorship support and an available coworking space, CultureWorks curates and manages a number of events that connect artists with one another. A resource hub for information and community events, as well as an intentional connector of artists and artistically-focused organizations, CultureWorks seeks to strengthen Philadelphia's creative ecosystem.

Blog Posts & Newsletter

Guest Blog Post: Remember that your organization can submit a guest blog post about your efforts and receive an unrestricted honorarium! Check out the guest blog post guidelines on our website.

Report Blog Post & Newsletter: The Foundation may also reach out to feature your organization based on information from your most recent grant follow-up report. Foundation staff will write the article and share a draft with you before publication.

Board & Staff Updates

Honoring Radclyffe "Mike" Thompson

After 30 years of service on the Presser Board of Trustees, Mike Thompson will transition to an Honorary Trustee role in July.

Thompson, a Vietnam Army veteran, retired senior vice president of the Pennsylvania Trust Company, and member of the Orpheus Club chorus, has served as a Board Member since 1996. He has served on the Finance, Capital Support, and Advancement of Music Committees and has chaired the Assistance to Music Teachers Committee since 2013.

A longtime music lover who sings and has also played the piano and clarinet, Thompson fondly recalls introducing the current grantee, Chester Children's Chorus, to the Foundation in 2003. At that time, receiving a grant from the Foundation would "be hugely important" for the music and math-focused education group based in Swarthmore. They did receive a grant that first year, and have received continuous support ever since.

We are grateful for Thompson's influence and 30 years of service. As an Honorary Trustee, he will remain engaged, serving on the Advancement of Music Committee.

You can learn more about his life and passion for music in this [blog post](#).

Graduate Fellows Update

Erica Breitbarth, Graduate Research Fellow

"This year has flown by! Through stakeholder conversations and research, I have learned so much about the role philanthropy plays in supporting the music ecosystem in the Greater Philadelphia area and beyond. I truly believe in The Presser Foundation's belief that equitable access to all musical experiences transforms communities and have come to understand the ways that organizations are finding creative ways to dismantle barriers to access so that more people can learn and enjoy music. Sharing our barrier and strategy research and connecting with grantees in the recent Next Movement forum was a powerful reminder of the role collaboration and community play in this important work. As a music educator and vocalist, I have always been on the receiving end of the grantmaking process, and this year has helped me better understand firsthand the complex and essential role funders play. I am grateful to The Presser Foundation for such an invaluable opportunity!"

Jeremy Jefferson, Graduate Music Fellow

"My time with The Presser Foundation has come to a close, and I am left with the feelings of pride, joy, and inspiration for the year I spent. I've always had a fascination with the city of Philadelphia ever since I first visited, and the Foundation gave me an avenue and reignited my passion to explore, enrich, and surround myself in the music environment. I've found

that the Foundation mirrors the welcoming feeling I've felt when I first arrived in Philadelphia. I'm forever grateful and fortunate to have worked with such wonderful people. It was only a year, but I've learned more about myself and my desire to experience all of the musical opportunities this city offers. I plan to stay in Philly and continue listening and supporting local art."

Summer Interns Announcement

We're pleased to welcome two undergraduate summer interns, Lani Rea and Sarah Shoff!

Meilani "Lani" Rea (she/her) is a junior at Temple University studying music therapy with a minor in psychology. Lani is embedded in campus life at Temple, serving as Co-Music Director of Temple's Queer Advocacy A Cappella Group, Pitch Please, and President of Thrift and Flop, Temple's Thrifting and Sustainability Group. Passionate about the intersection of music and healing, Lani aspires to work with youth and adolescents through creative and arts-based interventions. Her work experience includes shadowing a music therapist at Project HOME, facilitating music therapy sessions with a group of adults with autism, and completing a research internship with CHOP's Center for Autism Research.

Sarah Shoff (she/her) is a junior at McGill University (Montreal) studying classical vocal performance with a minor in management. Sarah has immersed herself in music and musical theater, serving as the publicity coordinator and social media manager for McGill Classics Play, where she conducted outreach to academic and industry professionals, created social media ticketing drives, and distributed of print materials. She also volunteered as a social media intern with The Stagecrafters Theater, working to create content with their marketing team. Sarah is passionate about diversity and mental health programming.

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