PENN LIVE ARTS
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

THE FUTURE TAKES SHAPE

CONNECTING CAMPUS, COMMUNITY AND WHAT'S NEXT IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

Penn Live Arts Strategic Plan: 2026 – 2031

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF ADVISORS

The Penn Live Arts Board of Advisors is proud to endorse this strategic plan and the vision it represents for the future of the performing arts at Penn.

At its core, this plan reflects a shared belief that the arts are essential to the University's mission. They foster creativity, deepen learning, strengthen community, and connect the University to the broader world. At a time of significant investment in Penn's arts ecosystem, this plan provides a clear framework for advancing that vision and ensuring that Penn Live Arts remains a vital cultural and educational resource for both campus and the greater Philadelphia region.

Throughout the planning process, the Board of Advisors was inspired by the dedication and ambition of the staff, University partners, artists, and community members who contributed to their perspectives. The result is a plan that is both aspirational and achievable—one that invests in student learning and experience, artists and audiences, strengthens connections between campus and community, and positions Penn to play a leading role in shaping the future of the performing arts on campus, in the region, and nationally.

The Board of Advisors is deeply committed to supporting this work. Together with the leadership of Penn Live Arts and the broader Penn community, we look forward to helping bring this vision to life and ensuring that the performing arts continue to thrive at the University for generations to come.

As I conclude my service as Chair, I am grateful for the opportunity to play a small part in this exciting chapter. The future of Penn Live Arts is bright, and I am confident the organization is well positioned to achieve lasting artistic, educational, and civic impact.

STEVE KOBRE
CHAIR, BOARD OF ADVISORS



Platt Student Performing Arts Center rendering

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Penn Live Arts sits at the center of a pivotal moment for arts and culture at the University of Pennsylvania. By connecting campus and community, championing artistic innovation, and expanding access to transformative artistic experiences, we are redefining the role of the performing arts within a leading research university while serving as a national model for cultural and civic engagement. The opening of the Platt Student Performing Arts Center, the integration of Irvine Auditorium, and the future opening of the Stuart Weitzman Theatre will significantly expand our ability to serve students, artists, audiences, and communities while creating one of the country's most ambitious performing arts ecosystems.

This strategic plan is the culmination of a year-long process that engaged staff, advisors, University partners, artists, audiences, and community stakeholders in considering the future of Penn Live Arts. Through interviews, research, workshops, committee deliberations, and organizational analysis, we examined both the opportunities ahead and the challenges we must address as we enter a period of significant institutional growth. The process was designed not only to identify priorities but also to test their feasibility through financial, organizational, and operational planning, ensuring that the final recommendations are both ambitious and achievable.

The plan builds upon our mission to connect diverse audiences with visionary artists and innovative ideas through transformative artistic experiences. It advances our vision of becoming a leading force in the future of the performing arts nationally. It reaffirms our unique role as presenter, partner, educator, venue operator, and cultural convener while outlining a path for deeper investment in artists and new work, stronger connections between campus and community, expanded organizational capacity, and long-term financial sustainability.

Aligning with Penn Forward and the strategic vision advanced by the Office of the Vice Provost for the Arts, these efforts recognize arts and culture as essential to the life of the University: fostering creativity, supporting discovery, and connecting Penn more deeply to the world beyond campus. By uplifting artists and investing in new work, creating stronger partnerships across campus and throughout the Philadelphia region, and through the thoughtful stewardship of an expanding portfolio of venues, Penn Live Arts will shape the future of the performing arts while advancing the University's broader aspirations for innovation, engagement, and impact.

At its heart, however, this plan is about people. It is about artists whose work challenges and inspires us, students discovering new possibilities, and audiences coming together across backgrounds and perspectives. It is about strengthening the connections between Penn and Philadelphia, one of America's greatest cultural cities, and using the arts to create meaningful encounters that enrich our shared civic and cultural life. At a time when our communities need spaces for dialogue, understanding, and shared experience more than ever, the performing arts remain a powerful force for building connection and empathy.

I am deeply grateful to the staff, advisors, planning committee members, University colleagues, artists, and community partners whose expertise, candor, and vision helped shape this plan. I look forward to working together to bring it to life and to advancing Penn Live Arts' next chapter of artistic excellence groundbreaking impact.

CHRISTOPHER A. GRUITS
EXECUTIVE & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Stuart Weitzman Theatre rendering

INTRODUCTION

Over more than 55 years, Penn Live Arts, originally established as the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, has become a vital asset for the University of Pennsylvania's students, faculty, and staff, serving as an artistic crossroads between Penn and the greater Philadelphia region. On campus and beyond, Penn Live Arts enhances the University's curriculum through artist residencies and masterclasses, supports student performing arts, provides career development opportunities, and connects Penn with broader communities through world-class music, dance, theatre, and film presented both on campus and at venues across the city.

As this strategic plan was developed in 2025 and 2026, we were preparing to expand our portfolio by taking on the operation of additional campus venues, including the Platt Student Performing Arts Center (26/27 season), Irvine Auditorium (26/27 season), and the Stuart Weitzman Theatre (28/29 season). At the same time, we sought to further amplify our new brand identity and deepen engagement both within and beyond Penn's campus.

This planning process also unfolded during a period of broader institutional transition. In January 2025, Penn welcomed a new Vice Provost for the Arts, Timothy Rommen, and in September 2025, the University launched Penn Forward, a university-wide strategic planning initiative to shape its future.

To support the plan, our leadership team developed a five-year financial projection building on our strategic objectives and FY27 budget.

FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENTS

MISSION STATEMENT

Penn Live Arts connects diverse audiences with visionary artists and innovative ideas, engaging both the University of Pennsylvania and the greater Philadelphia community in transformative artistic experiences.

VISION STATEMENT

Penn Live Arts will be a leading force in the future of the performing arts nationally – nurturing artists and new work, connecting campus and community, and advancing meaningful innovation and impact.



Martha Graham Dance Company by Mark Garvin



Audience in the Zellerbach Theatre by Mark Garvin

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Integrating our mission to provide the Penn community and Philadelphia with transformative artistic experiences and centering our vision to be a leading force in the future of the performing arts, these guiding principles communicate our intentions and priorities over the next five years.

CREATE TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Our work will leave artists and audiences changed – intellectually, emotionally, socially, or spiritually.

CONNECT CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY

Our efforts will strengthen and grow meaningful connections on campus and between Penn and Philadelphia audiences, artists, and ideas.

DRIVE THE FUTURE OF THE ART FORM

We will nurture artists and new work, take smart risks, and invest in innovation that advances the performing arts.

To deliver our guiding principles, we commit to these ideas in action:

- **Artists at the Center, Audiences in Mind**
  Our work is centered on supporting artists and producing transformative experiences for all.
- **Resilience Through Growth**
  We build capacity and diversify resources to thrive in a changing world.
- **One PLA, Many Voices**
  We value collaboration across people, teams, departments, disciplines, and communities.
- **Innovation is Everyone's Job**
  Every team member contributes to our reputation as a creative leader.
- **Service Sets Us Apart**
  Professionalism and care define every interaction.



Choir! Choir! Choir! audience

ANNUAL FOCUS

As we implement our strategic plan, each year will focus on the following overarching priorities.

YEAR 1 (26/27 SEASON)

Build the Foundation: People, Places and Systems

YEAR 2 (27/28 SEASON)

Integration & Activation: Campus and Community Integration

YEAR 3 (28/29 SEASON)

Invest in Creation: Programs, Artists and New Work

YEAR 4 (29/30 SEASON)

Scale Our Work: Growth in Programs, Venues and Revenue

YEAR 5 (30/31 SEASON)

Amplify Our Impact: Institutional, Artistic and Community Outcomes



Black Violin and audience by Dennis Deganan Photography

STRATEGIC GOALS

Four strategic goals anchor this plan. Together, they chart a course through the 30/31 season (FY31), and each is supported by specific strategies, detailed in the pages that follow.

I: ADVANCE OUR REPUTATION AND BRAND AS A DISTINGUISHED, INNOVATIVE PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATION

Connecting audiences and artists in cross-cultural programming to encourage empathy and understanding in our world.

II: INTEGRATE MORE DEEPLY INTO THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S CAMPUS LIFE

Creating arts experiences that incubate the next generation of arts creators and inspire supporters, cultivating a pipeline from Penn to the world.

III: INTEGRATE MORE DEEPLY INTO THE GREATER PHILADELPHIA REGION'S ARTS COMMUNITY

Leveraging artistic vision, spaces, and partnerships to elevate Greater Philadelphia's arts ecosystem and generate meaningful cultural, educational, and civic impact.

IV: ADVANCE OUR CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY TO ENSURE LONG-TERM IMPACT

Ensure efficiency, innovation, and resilience by enhancing internal capacity and diversifying funding sources.

GOAL I: ADVANCE OUR REPUTATION AND BRAND AS A DISTINGUISHED, INNOVATIVE PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATION

Connecting audiences and artists in cross-cultural programming to encourage empathy and understanding in our world.



Rennie Harris Puremovement in *Losing My Religion* by Mark Garvin

KEY STRATEGIES

1. We will anchor our artistic work in our dual mission of serving both the Penn community and the broader public, positioning Penn Live Arts as a bridge between campus and the regional and national performing arts landscape through programming, partnerships, and engagement.
2. We will establish Penn Live Arts as a leading incubator and accelerator of new work, especially in music and dance, through strategic investment in commissioning, producing, and sustaining selected artists and projects. Such work to advance the field will be carried out in alignment with Penn's commitment to innovation.
3. We will deepen partnerships and collaboration across campus and with community and arts organizations to support cross-disciplinary work, expand curatorial perspectives, and enhance our artistic reputation.
4. We will elevate storytelling and brand visibility, documenting and curating our artistic legacy and innovation to build a cohesive narrative that strengthens recognition at the campus, regional, and national levels.
5. We will invest in the infrastructure and resources needed to sustain artistic leadership and strategic growth, including dedicated staffing and financial support for commissions, artist fees, outreach and engagement efforts, as well as high standards of care.

GOAL II: INTEGRATE MORE DEEPLY INTO THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S CAMPUS LIFE

Creating arts experiences that incubate the next generation of arts creators and inspire supporters, cultivating a pipeline from Penn to the world.



KEY STRATEGIES

1. We will be the "home for the performing arts" at Penn through venue integration on campus and the investment in and management of capital assets. We will align with the Vice Provost for the Arts' strategic plan and connect meaningfully with other university-wide initiatives like Penn Forward to proactively serve as the on-campus convener that brings the university population together for multi-faceted experiences of the performing arts.
2. We will more deeply integrate into campus life through curricular partnerships, career mentoring programs, fellowships, and broader faculty and staff engagement. This connection could be further leveraged by using Penn's scholarly assets to make audience engagement more accessible and diverse.
3. Our integration with the university community will be centered on engaging students, faculty, and staff – current, past and future – as well as address administrative integration with other relevant units on campus.
4. We will augment and diversify internal infrastructure and build cohesive external messaging to on-campus stakeholders to facilitate this integration.

GOAL III: INTEGRATE MORE DEEPLY INTO THE GREATER PHILADELPHIA REGION'S ARTS COMMUNITY

Leveraging artistic vision, spaces, and partnerships to elevate Greater Philadelphia's arts ecosystem and generate meaningful cultural, educational and civic impact.



Children's Festival audience by Mark Garvi

KEY STRATEGIES

1. We will elevate the Philadelphia arts ecosystem to benefit the organization, the university, and the community.
    - Offer venues to presentations that align with our artistic vision but do not have another home in Philadelphia.
    - Fully establish innovation and incubation as key components of our artistic playbook. Incubation will be formalized as a defined program.
    - Leverage our new spaces to extend our reach and deepen our relationship to Philadelphia to strengthen the bridge between the community and the University.
    - Contribute meaningfully to meeting Philadelphia's needs, addressing broader social issues such as cross-cultural understanding, arts education, and civic engagement through the arts.
2. We will leverage our resources to build long-term, revenue-generating, mutually-beneficial partnerships to help advance our other strategic goals.

GOAL IV: ADVANCE OUR CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY TO ENSURE ITS LONG-TERM IMPACT

Ensure efficiency, innovation, and resilience by enhancing internal capacity and diversifying funding sources.



KEY STRATEGIES

1. We will invest in organizational capacity balanced with financial sustainability to ensure we have the resources and systems in place to achieve our goals. Additional staff and Advisory Board members, as well as a scalable organizational structure, will be required.
2. We will seek more ticketing, rental, and contributed income resources to act nimbly and with greater security.
3. We will continue to assess our evolving needs and consistently reevaluate the allocation of resources.
4. We will build an endowment to support our aspirations and enhanced operations.