



*Cultural District planning meeting with the “Band of Dreamers” in New York City 1979*

## Pittsburgh Cultural Trust

The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust grew from the vision of H.J. “Jack” Heinz II, then-CEO of Heinz Inc., who gathered a group of civic, business and community leaders called the “band of dreamers” to leverage the arts in catalyzing a revitalized Downtown Pittsburgh. When the Cultural Trust was founded in 1984, it was tasked with transforming a 14-square-block area that was a downtrodden red-light district marked by urban blight and “adult” establishments. But Jack Heinz, founding president and CEO Carol Brown and their partners saw an opportunity. In addition to controlling arts presentations, the Trust would also own and manage real estate within a new Cultural District, giving it the potential to self-sustain in the long term, to more easily attract new audiences and to make Pittsburgh more attractive to private investment.

The Trust thus launched with support from The Heinz Endowments and other foundations and dove into restoring historic theaters, constructing new performance venues, commissioning public art projects and developing new urban and riverfront parkland. This holistic approach to redevelopment of a city once called “hell with its lid off” and still reeling from the collapse of the steel industry was audacious from the outset, especially at time when other cities were housing cultural activity within a single performing arts center or abandoning their downtowns entirely for strip malls and big-box stores. With more than \$200 million in foundation support, including more than \$100 million from the Endowments, however, the Cultural District transformed into a thriving hub of world-class art and entertainment with urban parks, riverfront recreation, residential developments and even parking facilities woven in among its theaters, galleries and public art.



*Theater Square on Penn Avenue 2024*

Today, the Cultural Trust also offers art projects, educational programming, operational support and shared services for non-tenant arts organizations while managing more than a dozen District properties. Once considered nuisances or beyond repair, these theaters and galleries are now home to the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, the Pittsburgh Public Theater and many more. The Trust approach has also grown into a local point of pride and a national model of urban redevelopment through the arts, with an estimated \$303 million economic impact as one of the country’s largest land masses “curated” by a single

nonprofit arts organization. Even after the downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic, some 2 million people continue to attend the Cultural District's more than 1,500 events every year, from small local gallery shows to major touring Broadway productions.

Building on our shared histories with the Heinz family, the Endowments has supported the Cultural Trust from its earliest days to the present. In early 2025, the Endowments approved \$5 million toward the construction of the groundbreaking Arts Landing civic space, a key element of a broader plan called the Downtown Revitalization Vision, which was unveiled in 2024 by local and state officials along with civic, community and philanthropic leaders. The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust remains an anchor organization of the city's revitalized Downtown and the institutions flourishing within it—across the arts and beyond.