2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

Happy 2026! PACE begins the year with strong momentum following a transformational 2025. Last year, we celebrated **twenty years** as the premier philanthropic network for funders dedicated to strengthening American democracy through active civic participation. It was also a year of significant organizational transformation: PACE welcomed a new CEO, launched a five-year strategic plan, unveiled a refreshed logo and brand, and hosted our largest-ever member convening—bringing together funders from across the country to learn, share, and collaborate.

As we embark on what promises to be another watershed year, full of both challenges and opportunities, we invite you to reflect with us on the highlights and achievements of 2025.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2025

CEO Transition

For the first time in a decade, PACE welcomed a new CEO. Shannon N. Green joined the organization in February, immediately following four years spearheading democracy, civic engagement, and anti-corruption efforts at USAID. A widely respected expert in democracy and governance, Shannon brings deep expertise not only in understanding how democracies erode, but also how they can be reimagined and renewed.

She is building on the strong foundation and reputation established under PACE's previous CEO, Kristen Cambell, who skillfully led the organization through a period of significant growth in both membership and influence.

We sincerely appreciate our Board of Directors and members for their support and guidance throughout this transition, positioning PACE for continued impact, growth, and service to the field.

Strategic Plan

PACE released a new strategic plan for 2026–2030 designed to equip our members—and the wider philanthropic sector—to meet the urgent challenges and emerging opportunities facing American democracy. The plan commits PACE to:

- **Activating our community** to make bold, coordinated investments that reinvigorate Americans' commitment to one another and to a shared democratic future;
- **Mobilizing a broad, diverse coalition of funders** to revitalize our communities—and our nation—through sustained civic engagement; and
- **Forging partnerships** among national, regional, and place-based funders to reinvent governance systems and practices so they deliver for all Americans.

Over the next five years, PACE will help catalyze a civic renaissance by activating funders to invest holistically, courageously, and consistently in citizen engagement as a central driver of democratic renewal. We seek to serve as the indispensable home for funders who embrace fearless experimentation and boundary-crossing collaboration.

PACE will advance this work through four strategic priorities:

- **Increasing Member Engagement** – Providing transformational experiences to members by creating spaces for immersive learning; nurturing collaborations between national, regional, and local members; and offering opportunities for collective action among members
- **Building Coalitions for Action** – Helping funders move through chaos toward clarity by catalyzing and scaling action coalitions that unite funders across ideological, geographic, generational, and sectoral differences
- **Strengthening the Civic Field** – Serving as a trusted thought leader and convener in civic philanthropy by generating evidence and data, leveraging insights from experts and researchers, offering practical tools, and tracking developments in the democracy ecosystem and political environment
- **Shaping a Unifying Civic Narrative** – Developing narrative resources and amplifying an overarching civic story to rekindle Americans' patriotism and dedication to democratic norms

> *"The 2026–2030 plan is a thoughtful, well-structured document. Its theory of change is clear, its goals are measurable, and its moral tone—pluralism, courage, experimentation—is genuinely civic rather than partisan. PACE rightly grounds democratic renewal in citizens and communities rather than top-down social engineering. The plan succeeds in framing philanthropy not merely as funder but as participant in civic life."*

Brand Refresh

PACE debuted a new brand identity that reflects the organization's evolution and aspirations. The refreshed logo accompanied the release of our five-year strategic plan and visually conveys our commitment to convening a broad set of funders for shared learning, dialogue, and action.

PACE
PHILANTHROPY FOR ACTIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Thought Leadership

PACE cemented its role as a trusted thought leader for civic philanthropy. Through op-eds, media coverage, and growing social media engagement, we expanded our reach and fostered a vibrant, connected community of funders deeply engaged in democracy work, as well as those that are "civic adjacent."

In 2025, Shannon published two pieces in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* outlining concrete strategies to protect civic space and leverage narrative to build public support for democracy:

- Nonprofit Rights Are Under Attack. Here's a 7-Part Playbook to Fight Back.
- To Protect Democracy, Tell a Better Story About Why It Matters with Eric Friedenwald-Fishman of Metropolitan Group

PACE's work was also cited across leading sector publications. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* referenced PACE's work in an op-ed by Benjamin Soskis from the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy: Civil Society Is Under Attack. What Is It, Anyway?.

Our **Democracy Futures Project** was noted in Josh Lerner's piece in *Nonprofit Quarterly*: Three Emerging Strategies for Renewing Democracy, and in an op-ed from AEI by Senior Fellow Daniel Stid and Civitates' Fund Director Elisa Peter: What Democracy Funders on Each Side of the Atlantic Can Learn From Each Other. And our **Civic Language Perception Project** was included in Trusting News' end of year round-up of data that every journalist should know.

Finally, PACE was featured in a long-form profile piece in *Inside Philanthropy*: A Rapidly Growing Network for Democracy Funders, which underscored how we are helping funders navigate this moment of profound uncertainty–and opportunity–for civic renewal.

Membership

PACE continued to grow in 2025, reaching its broadest membership since its founding in 2005. With approximately 85 members—and counting—the network brings together funders from across the country and ideological spectrum, united by a shared commitment to learning, experimentation, and collaboration. **Thank you to our members for the insights, thoughtfulness, and knowledge that you bring to this community.** In 2026, we will double down on our mission to bring fresh perspectives to philanthropy, intentionally recruiting members that enhance our community's viewpoint, geographic, generational, and sectoral diversity.

As part of its commitment to providing transformational experiences for members, PACE hosted **fifteen** virtual and in-person programs in 2025. Our fall Member Meeting was the largest and most diverse to date, with 49 member organizations attending in person—up from 31 in 2024. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 89% of participants rated the meeting as highly useful.

> *"During the day I found myself thinking about big ideas and concepts with incredibly smart people. Too often I find myself in the daily grind doing the work with little time to view things from a more global perspective. Thank you for getting us off the dance floor and onto the balcony."*

Wrap-up of Democracy Futures Project

PACE completed its groundbreaking 18-month Democracy Futures Project, designed to expand philanthropy's capacity to think long-term, anticipate change, and invest proactively in the future of American democracy. More than 60 funders participated in the four-workshop initiative, with over 100 additional participants joining virtual reflection sessions.

PACE shared what we learned along the way, publishing summaries of insights and offering toolkits to enable others to replicate the experience. Our conclusion: philanthropy needs to pay far more attention to foresight and futuring as part of a comprehensive approach to civic renewal. If democracy is to remain legitimate, it must not only defend itself but also meaningfully evolve. Achieving this requires expanding our imaginative capacity, not just our technical capacity. Futures and foresight work provides a disciplined way to do so, testing assumptions and exploring possibilities that fall outside the gravitational pull of the current system.

🏛️ Democracy must evolve to remain relevant. Institutions designed for a pre-digital era are ill-equipped for fast-moving, unpredictable 21st-century challenges.

💡 Imagination is infrastructure. Visioning processes are essential for building public legitimacy and energy for reform.

⏳ Philanthropy is anchored in the present. The vast majority of resources fund short-term reactive work, leaving experimentation and long-term planning underfunded.

🌐 Ecosystems matter. Connecting innovations and learning across disciplines and borders is more powerful than isolated initiatives.

🚀 Funders can act as futurist change agents by seeding bold experiments, supporting local legitimacy, and creating conditions for communities to define their own futures.

The task before us now is to ensure that democracy's future is shaped not by fear or inertia, but by purpose, possibility, and collective imagination. To sustain momentum, PACE is developing a scalable funding and learning initiative to help funders prioritize and incentivize future-oriented democracy work. This effort will support organizations across the United States in embedding futures thinking and visioning into their work, while fostering a vibrant community of funders committed to exploring, testing, and implementing innovative strategies for democratic renewal. Interested funders can learn more by reaching out to futures@pacefunders.org.

> *"The pro-democracy field needs to take imagination as seriously as it takes infrastructure. We need protected spaces for deeper reflection; methodologies that help us distinguish between what is merely familiar and what is genuinely necessary; and strategies that invite the public to articulate what kind of democracy they actually want, not only what they fear losing."*

Launch of Pro-Democracy Narrative Playbook

Recognizing the importance of communication in strengthening democratic values and engagement, PACE expanded its civic language work to equip organizations with pro-democracy narrative resources and technical assistance. In partnership with the Metropolitan Group, PACE spent the year supporting the development of the Pro-Democracy Narrative Playbook, an evidence-based resource designed to help advocates across sectors counter authoritarian narratives and promote democratic values. Drawing on extensive multi-methodology research in the United States and 11 other countries, the playbook offers tested pro-democracy narratives grounded in freedom, fairness, and fearlessness, along with practical message frameworks that organizations can put into immediate use. All of the research and resources can be accessed at: https://prodemocracynarrativeplaybook.org.

In late 2025, PACE conducted a third round of survey research with More in Common for our field-leading Civic Language Perceptions Project. Building on previous waves, this phase not only re-tested perceptions of 21 civic terms but also explored how to communicate effectively with American voters about threats to democracy. Findings will be released in the coming months—stay tuned!

Development of a Civic Philanthropy Incubator

Throughout 2025, critical efforts emerged to help philanthropy stand up for itself, but coordinated action to respond to democratic backsliding and the shrinking of civic space remained limited. With support from the Freedom Together Foundation, PACE began quietly addressing this gap in the summer of 2025. Careful not to duplicate initiatives already underway in the field, we focused on identifying who is willing to act and what they are willing to do.

We began by surveying a broad base of institutional funders in October 2025 to understand their primary concerns and willingness to collaborate on addressing them. One hundred seventy funders participated; the findings will be released in January 2026. We then interviewed experts on the top two threats identified in the survey to gather actionable ideas for how philanthropy can respond effectively.

These insights will guide the development of collective action plans in 2026, equipping funders across the field with strategies to prevent abuses of power and strengthen democracy's guardrails in ways that align with their institutions' goals and values.

Join Us in 2026

PACE is committed to partnering with funders nationwide to advance a citizen-led renewal of democracy and civic life. If this aligns with your priorities, we would welcome a conversation about membership. Click here to learn more or reach out directly to shannon@pacefunders.org.

To our current members: we are so grateful for your continued engagement and excited to partner with you in shaping a vibrant civic culture for all Americans in 2026!