

Posted on 11/8/24



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COUNCIL MEETING BOOK

ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FOURTH MEETING

OF

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024

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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024

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**ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FOURTH MEETING
OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024
NOON
IN-PERSON MEETING**

**NEW ENGLAND BOTANIC GARDEN AT TOWER HILL
11 FRENCH DRIVE
BOYLSTON, MA 01505**

**NOTE: THIS IS AN OPEN PUBLIC MEETING AT THE ADDRESS NOTED ABOVE
AND WILL NOT BE LIVESTREAMED**

MEETING MATERIALS WILL BE POSTED ONLINE PRIOR TO THE MEETING

AGENDA

VOTE

1. **Call to Order- Open Meeting Law Notice**
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
 - *David Slatery, Deputy Director (Open Meeting Law Notice)*
2. **Welcome by Host Organization**
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
 - *Grace Chapman Elton, Executive Director, Tower Hill*
3. **Video Welcome.** *Video welcome from Executive Branch to the new fully-constituted Council*
4. **Minutes of 163rd Council Meeting** **X**
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
 - *David Slatery, Deputy Director (Reads the Roll)*

5. **Chair Report**
 - Marc Carroll, Chair
6. **Executive Director Report**
 - *Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director*
 - a. Executive Department Report
 - b. Equity Progress report
7. **Public Affairs Report**
 - *Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs*
8. **Business Operations Update**
 - *Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Senior Director of Business Operations & CFO*
9. **Presentation: Creative Sector Inventory**- *Presentation from Diversity North*
10. **Program Operations Report**
 - *Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations*
 - a. Updates
 - b. Reminder re Conflict of Interest Notifications
 - c. Additional FY25 Grant and Program Recommendations **X**
 - i. Organization Grants – Cultural Investment Portfolio & Operating Grants for Organizations
 - ii. Festivals & Projects
 - iii. Creative Projects for Schools
 - d. Designation of new Cultural Districts **X**
 - i. Downtown Westfield Cultural District
 - ii. Holyoke Puerto Rican Cultural District
 - iii. Watertown Cultural District
11. **Adjourn**



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024

RESOLUTIONS

Section 4- Minutes

RESOLVED: that the Council approves the minutes of the August 22, 2024 Council Meeting in the form presented.

Section 9 – Grant and Program Recommendations

RESOLVED: To approve the approach by staff to provide up to \$7,240,000 in unrestricted operating support grants to cultural organizations under the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and new Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Programs Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a grant allocation totaling \$1,850,000 to the Festivals and Projects program as presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve \$1,500,000 in Creative Projects for Schools grants as presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve the designation of cultural districts in Westfield, Holyoke and Watertown, Massachusetts in accordance with the memoranda presented to the Council Meeting.



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UNOFFICIAL DRAFT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL AT ITS NEXT MEETING

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-SIXTY THIRD MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, AUGUST 22, 2024

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Rhonda Anderson
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
Donna Haghghat
Cecil Barron Jensen
David S. Kong
Anika Lopes
Diane Asadorian Masters
Allyce Najimy
Ashley Occhino
Ellice Patterson
Mark Snyder
Julie Wake

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, Christian Kelly, Sara Glidden, Erik Holmgren, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, and Lisa Simmons; Mass Office of Travel & Tourism Executive Director Kate Fox; and Massachusetts Municipal Association Executive Director Adam Chapdelaine

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:06am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement:

Please note that this meeting is an open meeting of a public body subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. A notice of this meeting together with the agenda was posted on Mass Cultural Council's website 48 or more hours ago (excluding

Prepared on 10/7/24

weekends and holidays).

This meeting shall be open and accessible to all members of the public except at such times when this body has voted to go into closed executive session under the Open Meeting Law.

This meeting is a virtual meeting held under the Open Meeting Law as modified under current law to permit online open meetings. This meeting is being broadcast to the public on a publicly available YouTube or other channel as described in the publicly posted meeting notice. Only Council members, staff and invited participants and guests will be provided access to the Zoom or other videoconferencing platform hosting the meeting. As a safety measure, to prevent disruption of the meeting or non-public communications among the participants, the Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Committee of Mass Cultural Council has asked staff to implement the following protocols for participants in on-line meetings of Mass Cultural Council or its committees:

- Any "chat" or similar function on the Zoom platform hosting the meeting shall be disabled.
- Other than Council members or participants specifically recognized by the Chair of the meeting, all Zoom platform participants will be muted and have no ability to share media or documents or project or type images or text.
- All participants in the Zoom platform must enter a waiting room and digitally sign-in before being admitted.
- Any attendee in the Zoom platform who nonetheless causes a disruption will be summarily removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

This meeting is not a public hearing and public testimony will not be taken. Individuals may not address the meeting without permission of the Chair.

Any member of the public may record this meeting provided they do not interfere with the meeting. The Chair will then inform the members of the meeting that they are being recorded.

Draft minutes of the open session of this meeting shall be kept and shall be posted on Mass Cultural Council's website no later than 30 days after the meeting provided that such minutes shall not be considered official until they have been approved by this body in open session. Individuals asserting a violation of the Open Meeting Law may file a complaint with this body within 30 days or with the Attorney General's office thereafter.

The Chair welcomed Council Members and staff to the meeting, then turned the meeting over to Executive Director Michael Bobbitt who introduced a guest speaker: Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) Executive Director Adam Chapdelaine. The Agency spotlights a pertinent partner or collaborator at each Council Meeting to illuminate its advancement and cross-sector work. Mass Cultural Council recently partnered with the MMA on three events: two webinars focused on the Agency's grants to cities and towns, and a presentation at MMA's annual Mayors' Association gathering about the full scope of the Agency's work. Adam shared a bit about his background and gave a brief talk on the mission and work of the MMA. Michael thanked Adam for speaking to the Council and reiterated the importance of this new relationship.

Marc then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the March 21, 2024 Council Meeting & Retreat included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve the minutes. Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis moved to approve the minutes and Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin and Yvonne Hao were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the March 21, 2024 Council Meeting and Retreat in the form presented.

Marc gave his Chair's report noting that he would be brief given today's robust agenda. He reviewed the upcoming schedule of Council and Committee Meetings and noted that David Kong had not yet been assigned to a Committee; he and Jo-Ann will discuss a Committee assignment for David soon. He concluded by expressing his gratitude to the Governor and state legislature who funded Mass Cultural Council at a historic level in FY25. He then asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael shared that August is a very busy month. Staff is working hard to transition into the new fiscal year and begin launching grant programs in September. He encouraged Council Members to read the monthly report shared by Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to stay informed on the Agency's work. Michael, Dave, and Ann would welcome feedback, ideas, and insight from the Council especially relating to advancement work and relationship building. Michael gave a brief update on the Agency's equity work noting that this summer Mass Cultural Council launched its d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan and its Native American & Indigenous People's Equity Plan. Open Door Arts has launched a free assessment tool for all arts organizations (nationally) – organizations can complete an online form and receive a report indicating what actions they can take to improve their accessibility. Work is also being done to expand the UP Innovation & Learning Network so that it can reach more participants. Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless and her team are working to launch the Tribal Cultural Council program this fiscal year; it's modeled after the Local Cultural Council program.

There were no questions for Michael. The Chair asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her report.

Bethann let Council members know that formal convenings of the legislature ended on July 31st, but the session is not over. Meetings will continue through the calendar year with, most likely, no roll call votes. As Marc mentioned it was a very successful budget season. Bethann thanked Council Members for their advocacy throughout the process. Mass Cultural Council and its partners told the strong story of the cultural and creative sector and is thrilled that the FY25 budget signed into law by the Governor included a record high allocation for Mass Cultural Council of \$26.9 million – breaking down into \$25.895 million for Agency operations with the remainder going to funded legislative earmarks. The Economic Development Bill (Mass Leads Act) unfortunately did not come out of conference committee in time for a roll call vote. The Governor has called on the House and Senate to return for a special session and to take a vote on the bill this fall; leaders on both sides do see this as an option. This is slightly concerning as the bill as drafted includes an additional authorization for the Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF); but CFF has enough funding to cover the FY25 grant round so if it doesn't happen this year, it

can still be done next year with no disruption to the program. Throughout the fall staff will work on developing policy proposals. A new legislative session will begin in January. Bethann met with Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development Chair Mindy Domb recently to update her on Mass Cultural Council's work. Chair Domb shared that support for the cultural sector is strong in the House thanks to the good relationship between the Agency and the legislators across the Commonwealth, the Agency's transparency, and its partnerships. Bethann thanked staff from the Chair's office, who were observing the meeting via livestream, for their support. To conclude, Bethann shared that the Public Affairs team – in anticipation of the Council's vote today – is working hard to prepare the website for the launch of FY25 programs, and to create materials detailing all grant programs. Council Members will hear from Bethann as programs launch; they are encouraged to share grant opportunities with their networks. Staff is also working on a webinar series spotlighting grant opportunities available to the cultural sector through other state agencies.

There were no questions for Bethann; but Michael took a moment to thank Bethann and Public Relations & Events Manager Christian Kelly for the strong media coverage they secured for arts prescriptions and noted that there is more to come.

The Chair then paused and asked if Mass Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT) Executive Director Kate Fox who had joined the meeting as a guest would like to say a few words. Kate thanked the Chair and shared that she sees Mass Cultural Council as an impressive agency with a great team. MOTT is working hard on the Mass250 grant program - a competitive grant program that will award funds to support programming and interpretation that tell the stories of the American Revolution in Massachusetts and will increase tourism and travel to and within Massachusetts. The application deadline for the program is August 26th. MOTT is also implementing a new tourism campaign called "Made Possible" to showcase Massachusetts as a dynamic travel destination for visitors across the globe and the best place to live, raise a family, and build a business. Council Members can learn more at visitma.com.

Marc moved to the next item on the agenda and asked Michael to introduce the presentation on Mass Cultural Council's FY25 spending plan. Michael – joined by Senior Director of Programs Jen Lawless and Senior Director of Business Operations, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Human Resources Officer Catherine Cheng-Anderson – presented a slide deck outlining the Agency's spending plan for the new fiscal year. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Julie Wake is impressed with the Agency's work to coordinate artwork by Massachusetts artists for display in the Governor's Office; most recently a Cape Cod artist was featured.

There were no further comments or questions for Michael, Jen, or Catherine and Marc asked Dave to review the Conflict-of-Interest procedures for FY25.

Dave explained that under state ethics law Council Members may not take official action pertaining to any organization in which they have a financial interest, employment, or board membership; and, rather than leaving the room for the vote on grant recommendations, their conflicts of interest are disclosed in the minutes, and this indicates that they that take no part in the discussion or the vote on funding for any of those identified organizations. He asked Council Members to review conflicts of interest list in their materials and indicate if there are any updates and several members

updated their disclosures. Iván Espinoza-Madrigal disclosed that he is affiliated with the New England Foundation for the Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Art. Anika disclosed that she is affiliated with the Ancestral Bridges Foundation. Ellice Patterson is affiliated with Abilities Dance. Rhonda Anderson indicated that she is affiliated with Ohketeau Cultural Center, NEFA, and Mass Humanities. The full list of disclosures is included below.

The Chair had brief issues with his Zoom connectivity, so Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis moved to the next agenda item: the Grants Committee's recommendations on grant proposals for FY25 which were outlined in the prior presentation by Jen Lawless. The Chair then rejoined the meeting.

Grants Committee Co-Chair Cecil Barron Jensen shared that the presentation to the Grants Committee on August 8th was extraordinary, exhibiting impressive breadth and depth and a fresh take on how the Agency distributes its grants across the Commonwealth. The Grants Committee voted unanimously to recommend the grant proposals to the full Council. Grants Committee Co-Chair Julie Wake echoed Cecil's comments and congratulated the staff team for pulling together a strong plan for FY25.

There were no questions for Michael, Jen, or Catherine.

Marc shared that the Executive Committee had also unanimously voted to recommend the FY25 spending plan to the Council for a vote and proposed taking a consolidated vote to approve all parts of the spending plan and grant recommendations – Section 10 in the Meeting Book – unless there were further questions. There were none.

Mark Snyder moved to approve the spending plan and grant recommendations; Diane Asadorian Masters seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin and Secretary Yvonne Hao were absent and

WHEREAS, the General Court of the Massachusetts State Legislature has appropriated, and the Governor has signed into law, a budget of \$26,850,000 to the Mass Cultural Council for FY25;

WHEREAS Mass Cultural Council staff has presented a draft FY25 budget and spending plan to the Executive Committee at its meeting on August 8, 2024 (the "Plan");

WHEREAS the Executive Committee reviewed the Plan and recommended that it be forwarded to the Council for approval; and

WHEREAS Council staff presented the Plan to the Mass Cultural Council at its meeting on August 22, 2024 (the "Council Meeting").

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: To approve the Plan as recommended by the Executive Committee and presented to the Council Meeting subject to the further approvals of the individual grant and program recommendations below; and

WHEREAS Council staff presented the FY24 grants recommendations to the Grants Committee at its meeting on August 8, 2024 ("Grants Committee Meeting");

WHEREAS the Grants Committee recommended to the full Council the allocation of the grants presented at the Grants Committee Meeting;

WHEREAS the Grants Committee reviewed procedures of grant allocations and recommended that the Council approve the same;

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council a grant to Mass Humanities totaling \$977, 389 as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to NEFA of \$70,000, as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to Mass Creative for \$30,000 as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (or related entity) for \$50,000 for the MITx Arts Entrepreneurship Online Program as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a grant of \$100,000 to Art Pharmacy for continuation of the Social Prescription program as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To endorse the approach by staff to provide \$7,200,000 in unrestricted operating support grant to cultural organizations under both the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and new Operating Grants for Organizations as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To endorse the approach by staff to provide of the fifth cycle of the Gaming Mitigation Program as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$870,000 in Cultural District grants as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To make allocations to the Local Cultural Councils totaling \$5,700,000 as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$103,950 in allocations to Tribal Cultural Councils as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve grant allocations to YouthReach program in the amount of \$1,870,000, as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve Mass Cultural Council grants of \$1,500,000 to the STARS program as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a grant of \$36,000 to the Youth Arts Impact Network with EdVestors, \$25,000 in support of the NEA-funded Poetry Out Loud program and a grant of \$18,000 in leftover funds provided by the Linde Family Foundation for the now-concluded Creative Youth Development Teaching Artist Fellowship program to Health Resources in Action, all as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To allocate \$2,175,000 for at least 435 grants of \$5,000 as part of Grants for Creative Individuals Program (plus any unused funds from any other approved grant program for additional grants) as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve of the Projects/Festivals grants totaling \$1,850,000 as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve \$480,000 in UP Innovation Fund Grants, as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a \$50,000 grant to ArtsBoston acting on behalf of the Network Arts Administrators of Color, and a \$100,000 grant to Open Door Arts for the Arts and Culture Accessibility Resource Hub, as recommended by the Grants Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

The following Council Members abstained from voting and/or discussing grants pertaining to the organizations listed under their name:

Marc Carroll

- a. Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
- b. The Rivers School

Jo-Ann Davis

- a. The Care Center
- b. Springfield Museums
- c. MASSCreative

Cecil Barron Jensen

- a. Artists Association of Nantucket
- b. Egan Maritime Institute

c. Nantucket Cultural District

Che Anderson

- a. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
- b. Worcester Historical Museum
- c. Worcester Art Museum
- d. Institute of Contemporary Art

Donna Haghghat

- a. WAM Theater

Ivan Espinosa-Madrigal

- a. New England Foundation for the Arts
- b. Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA)

Julie Wake

- a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod

Rhonda Anderson

- a. Ohketeau Cultural Center
- b. New England Foundation for the Arts
- c. Mass Humanities

Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

Anika Lopes

- a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation

Marc congratulated all and reiterated that this is the largest operating budget in Agency history. He thanked Jen and the Programs team, Jo-Ann, Cecil, and Julie for their hard work bringing the recommendations to fruition.

Michael thanked Council Members for their support.

Catherine reported on one final item: she explained that under the Mass Cultural Council's Financial Policies, all out-of-state travel must receive pre-approval from the Executive Committee. At the August 8th Executive Committee Meeting, four proposed travel requests were reviewed, determined to directly benefit the Agency and its constituents and align with its strategic plan and newly adopted d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan, and were approved by the Committee. A Travel Authorization Form is on file for each employee and the total cost of the travel is \$6363.00. Marc added that the Committee agreed all proposed travel represented good use of staff time, and that staff would share their learnings at a future Council Meeting.

Marc asked if Council Member had any final thoughts or questions and Allyce Najimy shared that it was wonderful when Vice President Kamala Harris recently visited Pittsfield and the Colonial Theater was used as a venue for her speech, bringing national attention to the organization and the arts in Western Massachusetts. It would be wonderful if more arts organizations and venues could be used for events such as this. Marc agreed with Allyce and Dave noted that while it's fantastic for cultural

organizations to be used as venues for events that draw national attention and while the Agency could be involved with and promote events involving elected officials who are appearing as part of their official duties, he noted that the Agency would not be able to be involved in any political campaign activities.

There were no further comments or questions. Marc, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:30am.



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EXECUTIVE OFFICE UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2024

Activities report. On Monday November 4, Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon forwarded the November Executive Department Update detailing activities during the previous month. Please look for the next monthly update in December.

Executive Committee. The Executive Committee met on October 16 and approved the agenda for today's Council meeting.

Programs Committee (f/k/a Grants Committee). The Programs Committee also met on October 16 announced the change in name from Grants to Programs Committee in order to better reflect the breadth of the agency's support of the creative and cultural sector, heard in depth presentations on staff's new financial health advisory tool for cultural organizations and Arts Prescription and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Arts and Health Initiative and recommended for approval to the full council, the grant and program recommendations contained in section 9c of today's Council Meeting materials.

Advancement Committee. The Advancement Committee met on October 30, where it reviewed the agency's advancement efforts, and ideas concerning future award celebrations and discussed possible engagement activities for Council members.

Conflict of Interest Notifications. Similar to the August Committee and Council Meetings, since the November meeting will also consider approval of grants to a number of grantees, we are repeating our request to all Council members to report all potential conflicts of interests and connections with any cultural organizations or potential grantees so that the Agency's minutes and records can appropriately reflect that members recused themselves from any discussion or vote on grants or other Agency arrangements with which a member has a possible conflict. For further information, please refer to Deputy Director Dave Slatery's earlier email communications on this subject and Section 10b of this Council Meeting Book.

Open Meeting Law Materials. Based on questions we have received from Council members and a review of applicable law (the Attorney general's Office had a meeting of agency general counsels which reviewed the Open Meeting Law), we will be planning soon to circulate copies of resources related the law to the Council members.

A reminder that all Committee meeting materials (as well as all Council Meeting materials) are posted and available for review at our website's Council page at [Governing Council – Mass Cultural Council](#).



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EQUITY PROGRESS REPORT

NOVEMBER 2024

NEW EQUITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- Guided by the d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan, we are contracted a Screen Reader User Expert to test the accessibility changes made to our creative employment website, [HireCulture.org](https://www.hireculture.org).

SECTOR EDUCATION, SERVICES & ACHIEVEMENT

- The first public review of the Agency's d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan was a Zoom webinar on October 15 with Darian Gambrell and Nayo Franck from DEAF, Inc unpacking the distinction of Deaf culture and the condition of deafness.
- We have developed a new motion graphic illustrating our efforts and published three blog posts on the Agency's equity and access initiatives:
 - [Investing in a Diverse and Equitable Cultural Sector \(motion graphic\)](#)
 - [New Partnership Elevates Local Artists at the Governor's Office](#)
 - [State to State: Massachusetts' Native American and Indigenous People's Equity Plan](#)
 - [HireCulture Leading the Way on Wage Transparency](#)

PROGRAMS

- The Tribal Cultural Council Program launched with the [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Cultural Council](#) being the first Tribal Cultural Council ready to take applications. We anticipate additional Tribal Cultural Councils joining this winter.
- Public Affairs is supporting the Programs Team in launching the Mass Cultural Council's new [Tribal Cultural Council program](#) and web presence.
- The [Arts & Culture Accessibility Self Assessment](#) tool is available, and UP Organizations have been notified they will complete that as part of their participation in the UP Program this year. We are planning a webinar with Open Door Arts to promote this tool to the sector as well.

- We will host an ADA 101 session for the new recipients of Operating Grants for Organizations this winter.

INTERNAL

- Through our collaboration [El Planeta](#) we have effectively promoted each of the Agency's FY25 grant opportunities to Spanish-speaking audiences across Massachusetts, broadening our reach to new potential grantees.
- As the Artists Department collects applications for the Grants for Creative Individuals program, we are supporting Spanish-speaking applicants by providing Spanish-language materials, answering questions, facilitating access to the application, and ensuring they can submit applications on time in their preferred language.



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2024

Budget/Legislative/Advocacy Report

- Formal legislative sessions for 2023-2024 ended on July 31, however the House and Senate have continued to convene informally and work to advance important bills each week. Mass Cultural Council is hopeful the economic development bond bill, also known as the Mass Leads Act, will be released by the conference committee before the end of the session, as it contains a \$50 million recapitalization of the Cultural Facilities Fund. The Speaker of the House and the Senate President have publicly stated that they expect this matter to be resolved this fall and that they would call the Members back in for a special formal session to act on the bond bill.
- To continue building strong relationships with legislators and their staff and promote and market the grant opportunities Mass Cultural Council is offering in FY25, this fall we did an informational material drop in the State House. Every legislative office received a copy of our FY25 Programs At-a-Glance pamphlet as well as information on the Agency and the FY24 Funding Report for their legislative district. We find that each time we share news with legislators about funding opportunities or grants made we benefit from a spike in social media posts mentioning Mass Cultural Council in the #mapoli circles.
- Mass Cultural Council is working to developing policy, internally and with external stakeholders, that may be filed as legislation in the upcoming 2025-2026 session. We are helping promote creative advocacy focus group sessions that MASSCreative is hosting in locations around the state and attending meetings of the Governor's Creative Economy Advisory Council and its working groups and advising on that process.

Events/Communications/Digital Communications Report

- Mass Cultural Council hosted two in-person events in October, connecting with members of the sector and celebrating grant award decisions:
 - *Coffee & Conversation with Michael J. Bobbitt* at the JMAC in Worcester (October 17)
 - *Cultural Facilities Fund Grant Celebration* at The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst (October 18)
- We continue to amplify awareness of additional resources to the sector through our virtual [Spotlight Series](#):
 - [Mass Growth Capital Corporation](#) will talk about supporting small businesses and economic development (November 22)
 - [Open Door Arts](#) will provide an overview of their new Arts and Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment (December 6)
- **Save the Date:** upcoming convenings. If you wish to attend either event please email Bethann Steiner:
 - [Grants Celebration: Operating Support Grants](#) at the Heritage Museum & Gardens in Sandwich (December 2)
 - Arts Prescriptions Event co-hosted by the Health Equity Compact and Art Pharmacy at MCLE, Downtown Crossing, Boston (January 14)
- To elevate and build awareness around our FY25 Grant Opportunities, we've created a [Programs At-a-Glance webpage](#) and print piece.
- Public Affairs has continued a media partnership promoting grant opportunities with El Planeta Media, a Spanish language news outlet. Here are some samples of the deliverables to date:
 - Local Cultural Council Program: [El Mass Cultural Council abre solicitudes para las subvenciones de Consejos Culturales Locales apoyando proyectos comunitarios de arte y cultura](#)
 - Creative Projects for Schools: [El Mass Cultural Council anuncia nuevo apoyo financiero para escuelas destinado a proyectos creativos](#)
 - Grants for Creative Individuals: [Nueva oportunidad de apoyo financiero para individuos creativos a través del Mass Cultural Council](#) (featuring a quote from a FY24 grantee and a photo of our celebration in June)

- Cultural Facilities Fund: [El Mass Cultural Council anuncia una nueva ronda de subvenciones para instalaciones culturales](#)

WEB

Updated the web site in preparation for the Agency's FY25 activities, including:

- [FY25 Programs at a Glance](#)
- An expanded web presence [to mark our equity work](#), including an [Equity Journey Map](#)
- Program guidelines for LCC Program, Creative Projects for Schools, Cultural Facilities Fund, and Grants for Creative Individuals
- A web presence for the new [Tribal Cultural Council Program](#)

Devised and launched an [LCC Basics Training](#) using a new LMS system. This resource will welcome and instruct new LCC members in administering their program for years to come.

BLOG

- Published [25 blog posts](#) in the last quarter, in partnership with Program and Operations staff, to amplify and document the Agency's work.
- Our monthly [Opportunities & Resources for Orgs](#) blog posts hit a 1 year anniversary in August, garnering some 20,317 views by 11,463 users (3.5% of total massculturalcouncil.org users!)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Continued to expand our messaging via video content. Our most recent clips include:

- [We Believe in the Power of Culture](#) - a general message to hype the sector
- [Equity work motion graphic](#) - a general message to amplify our diversity and inclusion efforts
- [Cultivating a Vibrant Cultural Sector in Massachusetts](#) - an explainer on the through-line of public support for arts & culture from the State House to LCC-funded projects
- [5 Steps to Grant Making](#) - an overview for LCC members

NEWSLETTERS

Our newsletters continue to see growing numbers of subscribers and solid open rates. In the last quarter:

- [Power of Culture's](#) subscriber list rose by 1,500. Open rates averaged 52%.
- [Community Initiative News'](#) list rose by 1,000. Open rates averaged 48%.
- [Artist News'](#) list rose by 400. Open rates averaged 49%.



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BUSINESS OPERATIONS UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2024

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER UPDATE

1. **We are pleased to announce the recent update to Mass Cultural Council's Internal Control Plan.** Since our 2018 Internal Control Plan, there has been significant changes at the agency—new leadership, new staff, new roles, and new procedures/policies. The updated FY2025 Internal Control Plan reflects all these changes, offering a comprehensive roadmap for managing operations, safeguarding finances, and reflects rigorous compliance with State Finance Law and Comptroller Policies. This plan is integral to our agency's long-term success, and we are committed to annual updates to ensure it remains relevant and effective amid new challenges. The plan update focuses on three main goals:
 - A. **Proactively Managing Risks:** The plan is designed to help us identify and address potential risks that could impact our operations or the stakeholders/taxpayers we serve. By implementing structured controls, we're better equipped to prevent or minimize financial, operational, and reputational risks, ensuring our work continues smoothly—even when challenges arise.
 - B. **Ensuring Compliance:** Staying compliant with legal and regulatory standards is essential for us, and this plan serves as a valuable tool in meeting those requirements. It helps us avoid penalties and reinforces our reputation within the Commonwealth and with our stakeholders/taxpayers.
 - C. **Building Transparency and Accountability:** With clear processes, defined roles and responsibilities, and open communication lines, this plan enhances transparency and accountability across the agency. It's a way for us to show that we manage our operations responsibly, building trust and support from stakeholders/taxpayers who rely on us.
2. **The FY2026 budget process is underway.** In October, we submitted a Maintenance Budget request to the Administration for a modest funding increase to address several FY26 financial needs. This budget request served to support the Administration to prepare House 1 that will be filed on January 22, 2025. Recognizing the state's tighter fiscal environment, driven by slowed tax revenue growth, we focused our request on the following targeted support:

- A. The FY2026 request included funding to annualize FY2025 pay raises and new hires, as well as incremental funds for FY2026 union and manager salary adjustments (2% increases on 7/13/25 and 1/11/26) and FY26 union step increases.
- B. We also requested funding for two additional full-time equivalents (FTEs) to establish a dedicated team for our new advancement initiatives.

The total requested FY26 appropriation is \$26,462,569.46 for the budget request, comprised of the FY25 base (less earmarks) and an additional \$567,569.46 needed to support the above priorities.

This is part of the annual budgetary process that all state agencies must complete with the ANF. The figure provided is a preliminary calculation, and we have not yet begun internal planning or advocacy discussions with our partners regarding our FY26 funding request to the Legislature.

- 3. **We have submitted our FY26 grant application to the National Endowment for the Arts grant funding, with an exciting new request for \$75,000 under their new Arts, Health, and Well-Being Pilot program.** Mass Cultural Council aims to expand our statewide arts prescription initiative, designed to support individuals at high risk of social isolation and loneliness. This grant will help us deepen our collaborations with healthcare providers and community support systems. During the grant period, we'll focus on building cross-sector partnerships and enhancing our ability to communicate the powerful impact of arts prescriptions. **Additionally, our application includes our annual funding requests for NEA Partnership, Poetry Out Loud, Folk and Traditional Arts, and Arts Education programs.**
- 4. **As of November 1, we are four months into the fiscal year, and our spending remains on target or slightly below projections across most areas.** Spending typically lags in the first half of the year due to the time required to set up contracts, pay out grants and initiate services/projects. As contracts are finalized and projects advance, we anticipate a steady increase in spending, aligning with our projections for the latter part of the fiscal year.

SPENDING HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. This *core appropriation* summary compares Council-approved budget allocations to actual expenses as of October 31, 2024.

Total Council Approved Budget Allocations:	26,920,800
Total Expenses as of 10/31/24:	2,533,256

EXPENSES	STATE FUNDING	EXPENSES AS OF 10/31/24	% OF BUDGET EXPENDED	SPENDING PROJECTION S 10/31/24
AA: SALARY	4,114,759	1,287,150	31%	4,114,759
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	55,328	17,356	31%	55,328
CC: CONTRACT STAFF	-	-		-
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	66,654	15,574	23%	66,654
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	199,748	22,591	11%	199,748
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	296,675	112,847	38%	296,675
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	193,774	19,630	10%	193,774
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	293,350	29,261	10%	293,350
KK: NON-IT EQUIPMENT	2,200	-	0%	2,200
LL: LEASES	7,444	2,182	29%	7,444
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS	20,426,628	927,500	5%	20,426,628
PP: LEGISLATIVE EARMARKS	955,000	-	-	955,000
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	309,240	99,164	32%	309,240
TOTAL EXPENSES	26,920,800	2,533,256	9%	26,920,800

2. This summary presents a comparison between Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of October 31, 2024, encompassing both core appropriation and additional funding sources.

Total Council Approved Budget Allocations (All sources): 33,971,886
Total Expenses as of 10/31/24 (All Sources): 2,540,261

EXPENSES	TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENSES (ALL FUNDING SOURCES)	EXPENSES AS OF 10/31/24	% OF BUDGET EXPENDED	SPENDING PROJECTION ALL SOURCES 10/31/24
AA: SALARY	4,552,046	1,287,150	28%	4,552,046
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	60,725	17,356	29%	60,725
CC: CONTRACT STAFF	-	-	0%	-
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	263,657	15,574	6%	263,657
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	249,099	22,591	9%	249,099
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	352,010	112,847	32%	352,010
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	228,505	26,172	11%	228,505
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	333,350	29,261	9%	333,350
KK: NON-IT EQUIPMENT	2,200	-	0%	2,200
LL: LEASES	9,299	2,646	28%	9,299
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS	26,655,713	927,500	3%	26,655,713
PP: LEGISLATIVE EARMARKS	955,000	-	0%	955,000
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	310,283	99,164	32%	310,283
TOTAL EXPENSES	33,971,886	2,540,261	7%	33,971,886

3. FY25 Approved Spending Plan Documents are [linked](#) for reference purposes.

PEOPLE OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

1. Please join us in welcoming Lindiana Flores, the newest Program Officer on the Organizations Team. Lindiana’s primary focus will be supporting Operating Grants for Organizations and Card to Culture program. Lindiana previously

worked at Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the City of Worcester's Cultural Development Division and is the owner and executive director of Raices Latin Dance.

2. **We organized an employee volunteer initiative to support the Department of Children and Families' [Wonderfund](#) in their school supplies drive.** Our dedicated staff contributed volunteer hours this fall to unpack, sort, and assemble backpacks filled with essential school supplies. This initiative fostered employee engagement, allowing our team to come together in meaningful service and make a tangible impact in the lives of children, providing them with the support and resources they may not otherwise have had access to.
3. **To strengthen our fiscal capabilities, our payroll administrator is cross training another team member on payroll systems and processes.** This effort builds team depth, ensuring essential payroll tasks can be seamlessly managed by multiple professionals, enhancing continuity and compliance with Comptroller regulations.
4. **Cathy Cheng-Anderson, recently approved by the executive committee, attended the Strategic Human Resources Conference in Carroll, NH.** This conference provided a valuable training opportunity for HR executives, focusing on best practices for effective human resources leadership. The conference addressed pressing topics, such as leading change within organizations, strengthening employee relations, managing diverse and multigenerational workforces, and planning for succession.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND OFFICE OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Due to a recent rise in phishing emails, it's essential for all staff to stay vigilant and well-informed.** In line with our commitment to cybersecurity education and protection, we will continue to send our Monthly Cyber Security Awareness emails. These messages, sent to all staff members, are tailored to help everyone recognize and stay alert to the various online threats we may encounter, especially as phishing attempts become increasingly frequent and sophisticated.

We're also pleased to acknowledge the excellent job our staff has been doing in reporting suspicious emails. Your proactive approach in identifying and reporting potential threats is instrumental in maintaining our agency's cybersecurity.

2. **October is Fire Prevention Month, and this year, the Mass Cultural Council participated in our annual fire drill at 10 St. James Avenue.** We want to emphasize our commitment to ensuring the safety of all staff and visitors at our location. The drill was an important opportunity to review our emergency procedures and reinforce our dedication to a safe working environment.

3. **Evelyn Nellum has moved into a newly created role in the Business Operations Department as our Records Management Officer.** In this role, Evelyn will be responsible for developing and implementing the agency's records management program. She will ensure that both paper and digital records for programs and governing council activities are maintained in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and organizational policies.



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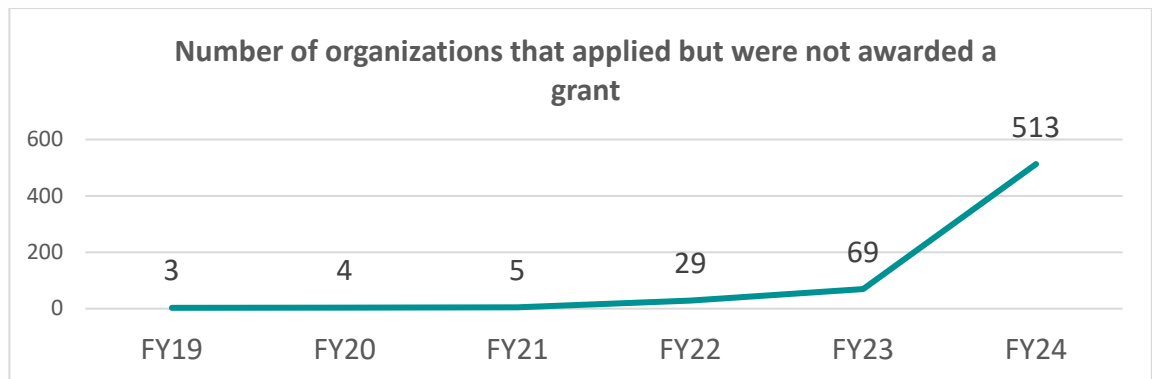
PROGRAM UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2024

Overview. Since we met in August the Program Team has been hard at work both on advancement and grant administration. What follows are updates about programs that are still in process.

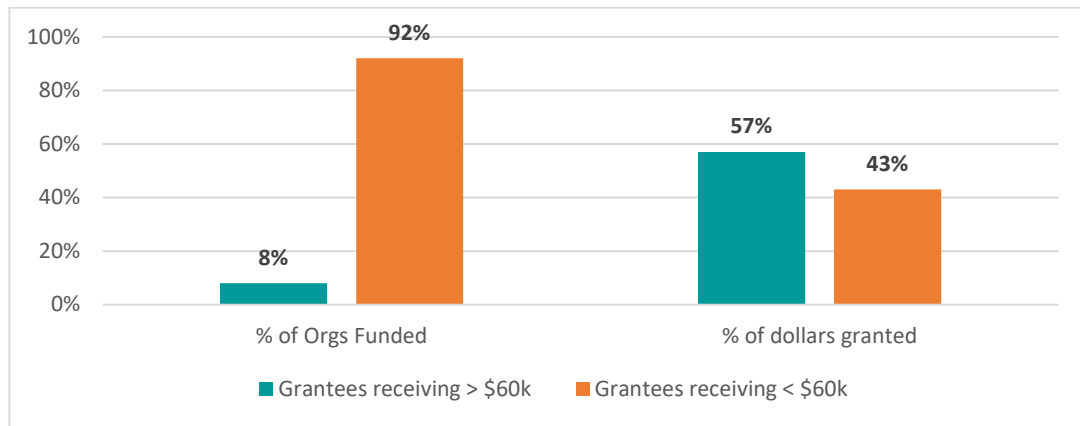
Advancing Equity and Extending Our Reach. To support our equity goals, Mass Cultural Council has expanded the organizations we reach through recruitment and outreach. Our applications have been simplified and streamlined and eligibility has been expanded over the past 3 years. We have seen a steady increase in applications from organizations in the cultural sector.

Already, as of early October we have received 2,543 applications from organizations and we have one program that is still open (Creative Projects for Schools), and two that are yet to open (Cultural Facilities Fund and Gaming Mitigation Fund). This exceeds the total applications we received from organizations in FY24 (2,515). Despite the increases to our budget, we have had to turn away an increasing number of organizations.



Mass Cultural Council staff reviewed the overlap between programs to see what impact organizations receiving multiple awards had on our ability to serve the sector more broadly. In FY24 86% of organizations received one grant, while 14% received more than one grant. We focused in on those organizations (excluding Local Cultural Councils) that received more than \$60,000 in total. These organizations typically receive one or more of our largest grants (CIP, Gaming, CFF).

We found that **8% of our grantees (118 organizations) received 57% of grant funds** made available to organizations in FY24:



	Number of Orgs	Dollars Granted
Grantees receiving > \$60k	118	\$15,771,131
Grantees receiving < \$60k	1,290	\$11,928,984
	1,408	\$27,700,115

To ensure that we can fund as many organizations as possible, we are working to thoughtfully coordinate and limit our grants. We have been moving in this direction over the past couple of fiscal years. In FY25 we are taking additional steps to address this issue:

- Cultural Facilities Fund will increase from a 1-year to a 2-year wait period for successful Capital Grant recipients.
- Organizations can only receive one of the following grants: Festivals & Projects, Creative Projects for Schools, Cultural Investment Portfolio(CIP)/Operating Grants for Organizations(OGO), Cultural District Investment Grant.
- The Gaming Mitigation Fund guidelines will specify that organizations receiving CIP/OGO are not eligible for Gaming.

However, in this transition year we will allow organizations to apply to both programs to determine which is most advantageous for their organization. More on this later in the memo.

As we move into FY26 and finalize the design and redesign of our programs we anticipate that ensuring our funds can reach as many organizations as possible will mean further coordination of and communication about our programs so that organizations will be able to determine which program is the best fit for them.

Advancement. Since we met in August the Program Team has been hard at work both on advancement and grant administration. The Program team is tracking advancement activities in our GMS/CRM (Grants Management System/Customer Relationship Management system). **The team has recorded 80 activities since the start of the fiscal year.**

What follows are some highlights about advancement work currently in process. It is not an all-inclusive list:

- Busking best practices and research on state arts transit partnerships.
- Meetings with MBTA and Massport.
- Governor's Office Exhibitions: Cape & Island artists and artists for Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month, Native artists to come.
- Upcoming: working with Exec Office of Housing on arts projects for public housing.
- Meetings/connections to advance traditional, immigrant, and indigenous artists.
- Met with the Berklee Institute for Music and Health to discuss potential future projects including aggregating research and potentially co-hosting a convening
- Attended the BMC Health EQTY Conference.
- Met with the (George) Lucas Museum for Narrative Arts.

- Opportunities with Mass Housing Stability Program.
- Access and accountability meetings with Smithsonian SEIA, WolfBrown, Mass Developmental Disabilities Council, MassRehab (MassAbility), Mass Housing, and others
- Continue to meet with funders to discuss advancement work and new directions for the agency.
- Meetings with Division of Developmental Services to support use of Card to Culture, with a focus on supporting residential facilities
- Continued work with Mass Development and Office of Housing and Livable Communities and Mass Downtown Initiative – around bringing on a consultant to review and advise on how our programs can work together to deepen the impact arts and culture in communities.
- Connecting with Mass Office of Travel and Tourism, MA 250th, and Regional Tourism Councils – Offer a series of webinars, membership and promotional options, and opportunities for LCCs and Cultural Districts. North of Boston is working to incorporate LCCs and Cultural Districts as members.
- Continued work with Mass Municipal Association – Attended the Annual Trade show. Hosted 2 webinars with municipal officials. Will attend Mayor's meeting July 24th and will be working with them on a series of webinars around arts and culture in communities. Attended the mayor's meeting.
- Connection to the Office of Rural Affairs, Ann Gobi. Conversations around how to support rural communities around arts and culture.
- Continued work with MAPC around their arts and culture program in communities.
- Connection to MOBD, Carolyn is part of the future Economic Assistance Coordinating Council meetings.
- Connecting with Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization. They are looking to provide technical assistance and funding for transportation projects based on regional goals and

public feedback and pursuing storytelling activities and activating walking/biking/rail trails.

Program Updates. In August, we let you know several programs were in the process of being redesigned or finalized for FY25. The following are updates about the programs, for your information/reference.

Access and Inclusion

Charles Baldwin

Of the 94 organizations with the status of UP Designation, 93 were able to complete the application/attestation for the \$5,000 UP Innovation Fund with just one organization, Flat Earth Theatre, which chose not to accept the award. In FY2024 each organization receiving the UP Innovation Fund is to complete the Arts and Culture Self-Assessment tool, developed by Open Door Arts, to assist with building or improving sustainable accessible practice. Office hours throughout the Fall are reviewing this requirement and examining its resulting reports.

The first public review of the Agency's d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan was a Zoom webinar on October 15 with Darian Gambrell and Nayo Franck from DEAF, Inc unpacking the distinction of Deaf culture and the condition of deafness. The first user/expert, Ryan Tevlin, was brought in to evaluate the HireCulture website for access and usability. Ryan is an instructor at the Carroll Center for the Blind and a graduate of the Screen Reader User Testing Training program (SRUTT). Contacts of people with disabilities are being gathered to begin sorting for a Disability Advisory Board.

Artist Team

Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Summer Confuorto

Grants for Creative Individuals

The deadline for applications to the [Grants for Creative Individuals](#), Mass Cultural Council's program to support individual artists, culture bearers, and creative practitioners (now in its second year), was October 24, 2024. We received 3,124 applications. Some initial stats about the applicants:

- 1,189 (38%) self-identify as BIPOC
- 596 (19%) self-identify as having a disability
- 2,944 (94%) of applicants have not received Mass Cultural Council funding in the past 6 years
- 62 (2%) self-identify as veterans of the United States Armed Forces

- 728 (23%) self-identify as being impacted by poverty*
- 652 (21%) self-identify as traditional artists*

* Please note these totals will likely change as staff verifies these self-identifications.

In the upcoming weeks, staff will distribute the applications to reviewers from the creative and cultural sector. We expect to share a list of recommended grant recipients at the February 2025 Programs Committee Meeting.

Advancement for Artists

The following represents the Artist Team's ongoing work to advance the creative and cultural sector, especially as it relates to individual artists.

- Ongoing partnership with Governor's Office to exhibit MA artists in the Governor's waiting room at the State House, including artists from the Cape and Islands, Latinx artists to honor Hispanic Heritage Month, and Native American and Indigenous artists (to come).
- Researching arts/transit partnerships, busking regulations, and independent contractor law to support continued conversations with MBTA and MassPort.
- Continued partnership with [Work Without Limits](#), offering benefits counseling so our grantees can understand the impact of our grants on their public benefits.
- Summer Confuorto from the Artists Team attended the Folk and Traditional Arts pre-conference at the National State Arts Agencies Assembly in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Communities Team

Lisa Simmons, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Carolyn Cole, Timothea Pham, Sommers Smith, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong

Cultural District Designation Redesign: The Cultural District Designation program (the process by which communities get a cultural district recognized) is being redesigned. We are not taking new applications to the Cultural District program in FY25.

We are excited to announce we will be working with [CivicMoxie](#) on the program redesign and look forward to sharing updates and information at future council meetings. The goal is to launch the redesigned program in July for FY26.

Tribal and Local Cultural Councils

We are excited to let you know the first Tribal Cultural Council was launched in September. The [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Cultural Council \(HPWTCC\)](#) accepted applications and had their deadline on November 1. We are in communication with three other Tribal Governments, and we anticipate additional councils launching in the winter.

The Local Cultural Council Program deadline was October 16. The 329 Local Cultural Councils received 12,591 applications. This was a slight increase from FY24 when they received 12,380. LCCs will review applications and finalize their decisions by January 16.

Cultural Facilitates Team

Jay Paget, Miranda Cook

In October MassDevelopment voted to finalize 17 new grant recommendations and to approve the FY25 Guidelines. The grant recommendations total \$2,608,000.

- 17 Capital Grants: \$2,608,000

After the May 2024 grant announcements, staff worked with a number of applicants who were not successful in updating their applications and provide additional information that was either unclear or missing from their last application.

The process largely revolved around the applicant providing estimates or bids for the work, resumes or qualifications for who is doing the work, updates on fundraising progress, operating plans for new ventures, timelines, and project budgets.

The new [Cultural Facilities Fund](#) application went live on October 10 and will be due December 19.

Staff conducted an Information Session now available on YouTube and has office hours twice a week until the application deadline.

Creative Youth Development/Education Team

Erik Holmgren, Amy Chu, Käthe Swaback

On Thursday, October 24th Erik Holmgren presented as part of a keynote panel at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., discussing the role of arts prescriptions as a way to support students and faculty at Art Schools throughout the United States. At the invitation of the Kennedy Center, Erik was part of a four-member panel moderated by Jeanette McCune, Senior Director of School and Community Programs. The panel included Dr. Susan Magnusman of Johns Hopkins, Dr. Ivonne Chand O'neal from MUSE Research and Tracie Jade, Executive Director of the B.L. Henson Foundation.

The panel and conference as a whole was a way to continue the conversation around expanding our social prescription program to schools. As we know, student mental health continues to be a significant challenge and was recently identified by 89% of our YouthReach grantees as the number one challenge in their work. When Erik announced from the stage that we have insurance companies supporting arts organizations in Massachusetts, it was met with enthusiastic applause from a packed room.

Grants Team

Deborah Kenyon, Colin Baylor

Since August, the grants team has been busy launching FY25 funding opportunities in the system and supporting applicants to meet fall application deadlines (LCC, Creative Projects for Schools, and Grants for Creative Individuals). We vetted the contact information and legal statuses of hundreds of new organizations that registered in our system to apply to our programs this fall. We also worked with the Organizations/CIP team to create their FY25 operation support funding formula for new and returning organizations. This involved our team reviewing hundreds of financial statements from organizations to assess financial health. In coordination with the fiscal team, we created and submitted to NASAA and the NEA our agency's partnership reporting requirements. To support our advancement efforts, we held a training session for program staff on standardized tracking of external engagement activities within our grants system.

Organizations Team

Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee

Team Updates

- The Organizations team is happy to welcome Lindiana Flores as our new program officer. She will lead Card to Culture, and support the Operating Grants for Organizations program.
- The team completed the review and scoring process for the first round of grants in the Operating Grants for Organizations program, and worked with a financial consultant to develop a formula for measuring financial health of organizations from information available on their 990/990EZ, and has used this information to flag the more challenged organizations, and use this in the calculation of FY25 operating support grants (Portfolio and Operating Grants for Organizations).
- New guidelines for the Gaming Mitigation grant program will launch on November 12, reflecting the work that has been done to clarify and simplify the application process.
- Staff continues to support the contracting process for Festivals & Projects grantees, and they have been worked to identify applicants to multiple programs so that the applicant receives the best possible grant option.

Gaming Mitigation Fund

For the FY25 Gaming Mitigation Fund we have updated the program to better align with the agency's equity goals and to better serve performing arts centers across the Commonwealth who present touring shows and artists.

Process: Data Collection and Analysis. To ensure that any updates made would meet our goals as stated above, we first gathered data from two sources:

- 842 organization's responses to questions asked in the Operating Grants for Organizations applications and the Cultural Investment Portfolio annual reports.
- Post-application surveys of Gaming grantees (one from FY24 and one from FY22).

The data gathered from the application questions showed that 178 organizations present touring entities, of which 95 meet our definition of a performing arts center. Of those 95, the organizations identified as not previously receiving funding from Gaming Mitigation will receive targeted outreach for the FY25 cycle.

From this data, we found that of 178 organizations, only 25% use an artist roster to book touring entities. As being listed on an artist roster was one of

the main credentials used to define and identify touring entities in previous years, this piece of the program needed to be updated to better reflect the reality of how organizations operate.

The need to update how we define touring entities was further supported when we looked at the survey results. Most organizations identified that finding and reporting on the credentials required to verify touring entities was the most challenging and time-consuming aspect of the program.

Based on this information, we held feedback sessions with previous grantees as well as some organizations who are part of our targeted outreach pool described earlier. These sessions allowed us to get deeper and more specific information on how organizations book and work with touring entities to refine our definitions and required credentials.

Updates to the FY25 Program. Based on the above data gathering and analysis process as well as our desire to better align this program with the agency's equity goals, the following changes are being implemented:

- Inclusion of performing arts centers owned by Federally Recognized Tribal Governments as eligible organization types. Non-profit Tribal, Native American, and Indigenous performing arts centers continue to be eligible for the program.
- Redefinition of Touring Entities and the credentials required to verify them in the application.
- Organizations will report on finances and performances for *their* Fiscal Year 2023 instead of a calendar year.
- Equity Impact Points will be added to the formula for BIPOC-Centered Organizations to ensure we are funding more equitably.
- Organizations receiving funding from the following Mass Cultural Council Programs are not eligible to apply: FY25 Cultural Investment Portfolio, FY25 YouthReach, and FY25 Operating Grants for Organizations.
- Moving Impact Questions from the application to a new Final Report.
- Two-year grant commitment (FY25 and FY26) if the grantee submits their Year-1 Final Report

For the FY25 cycle, we have more specifically defined a touring entity as shows or artists that have independent performing arts work that is generated or produced by the touring entity which they then make available to be booked for live performances.

Touring entities can either be presented by the organization or featured as Headliners in a work produced by the organization and must have the following credentials depending on whether the work is presented or produced.

- Presented Touring Entities must have a history of touring or touring schedule and a dedicated way of being booked for that independent performing arts work.
- Produced Touring Entities (Headliners) must have a history of touring or touring schedule as a headliner and name recognition that is used as a marketing tool.

Instead of capturing impact and advocacy data in the application, we are instead instituting a Final Report for this program. This will be more consistent with other grant programs and reduce the time and burden of the application process overall. As we are hoping to expand the number of applicants to this program through the changes made, simplifying and streamlining the application was a key goal. Grantees that do not complete the Year-1 Final Report will not receive the second year of the grant.

Timeline

November 12, 2024: Online application opens

January 9, 2025: Applications due by 11:59pm (ET)

February 12, 2025: This committee will receive funding recommendations



Power of culture

ADDITIONAL FY25 GRANT & PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations (Agenda Item 9ci)

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee
Dt: November 13, 2024
Re: Organizations grants: Operating Grants for Organizations and Cultural Investment Portfolio

Summary

In this section, you will find proposed information on the operating support grant programs for nonprofit cultural organizations and Cultural Affiliates (programs with a parent organization) in Mass Cultural Council's **Operating Support for Organizations (OGO)**, and the **Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP)**. A separate list of the grantees and grant amounts is listed in **Appendix B**. Due to the increase of funds and the redesigned Operating Grants for Organizations Program we will be able to provide unrestricted operating support to at least 51 more organizations in FY25 (394) than we did in FY24 (343)

The grant amounts for the two programs are formula based and were calculated together in one pool of grant recipients. Some organizations receive grants from multiple Mass Cultural Council programs, and as we move in a direction that is consistent with our Equity Plans and the goal of distributing funding across more organizations, these organizations will be directed to decide between various funding opportunities. Grant recommendations are built on the likely outcomes of these decisions.

Background

The Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP) provides multi-year grants to nonprofit organizations that provide public programs in the arts, sciences, and humanities in Massachusetts. The program was launched in 2009 and will be phased out over the next 4 years. In 2023, as part of a review of the agency's granting programs in the context of our Racial Equity Plan and other equity concerns, it was decided that we would 'sunset' the Portfolio and redesign our operating support programs. Operating Grants for Organizations (OGO) was a new program designed to retain some of the strengths of CIP, but also to be closely aligned with agency values as stated in the FY24 Strategic Plan. OGO launched in March 2024, and the FY25 grants will be the first awards made in this new program.

Operating Grants for Organizations

OGO will provide multi-year, unrestricted operating grants to nonprofit organizations that enrich Massachusetts' cultural life. These grants will work to strengthen a cultural sector that generates \$1.2 billion in economic activity, creates thousands of jobs, and delivers programs to more than 20 million people a year.

OGO had its first application deadline in June 2024. We received 581 applications, of which 480 were deemed eligible because they met the requirements stated in the published guidelines.

Applications were first reviewed by staff for eligibility, and all eligible applications were then reviewed by a team of internal and external reviewers—one internal staff reviewer and two external for each eligible application. Applications were sorted into 5 budget categories (A – E, largest to smallest), and were reviewed with similarly sized organizations.

Applications were scored on responses to 3 sets of questions which were based on criteria that are aligned with the strategic plan and counted for 75% of the total potential score. The remaining 25% of the score was based on the Prioritization categories stated in the guidelines: Funding History, BIPOC-Centered organizations, and participation in Card to Culture. The scored components were:

1. Demonstrate equitable practices (required)
2. Support Massachusetts' artists, humanists and scientists (required)

3. Advance the cultural sector, or engage their community deeply and authentically

155 organizations are being recommended for funding, with additional organizations being held on a 'waitlist', pending the outcome of applications to the Gaming Mitigation grant program. Approximately 33% of the applications have been recommended for funding and will be added to the 249 Portfolio organizations for a total of 388 proposed grantees.

Organizations recommended for funding:

- Have formula expenses that range from \$50,000 to over \$10,000,000 (2 organizations), and are proportionally representative of each budget group, which means that the highest scoring applicants in each budget group are present in the recommended group.
- One hundred twenty-nine (129) organizations will be receiving operating support for the first time.
- Fifty-eight (58) grantees have successfully completed the BIPOC-Centered self-identification form, and 39% of recommended grantees are BIPOC organizations.
- Twenty (20) grantees have not received funding from Mass Cultural Council in the past 3 fiscal years.
- Seventy-two (72) are participants in the Card to Culture program.
- Twenty-five (25) organizations had previously been funded in either the Portfolio or Gateway grant programs, out of seventy-two (72) eligible organizations which applied, which is statistically consistent with the proposed funding rate of the overall program.

Cultural Investment Portfolio

CIP has provided annual unrestricted operating support to approximately three hundred (300) organizations since 2009. It is winding down over a five-year period. Organizations were randomly assigned to FY24 – FY28 as their final year of CIP support, at which time these organizations need to apply to OGO for the opportunity to continue to receive unrestricted operating support. These organizations must continue to meet eligibility and annual reporting requirements.

Grant Award Calculations

The Organizations awards budget of \$7.2 million was approved by the Mass Cultural Council at the August 2024 meeting. This amount is an increase over \$7.096 million that was allocated for CIP's Portfolio, Gateway, and Media grants in FY24. We are recommending a total of

394 grants totaling \$7,240,000. While the recommended amount currently exceeds the total allocated to the program, we anticipate that due to the number of organizations that will forfeit their operating support grant in favor of their Gaming Mitigation grant, the final amount of our total operating support awards in both programs will ultimately fall below \$7.2 million and additionally we will have some extra so that we might be able to provide a final small round of grants to a few additional organizations beyond those included in this round (which we would report to the Council in February).

Based on this budget, we calculated award assignments for individual CIP and OGO grantees. Grants are based on a formula that takes into account a three-year average of an organization's cash expenses (Formula Expenses). In response to the large number of applicants, and our desire to increase the number of grantees, we reduced the Maximum grant from \$60,000 to \$55,000 and maintained the Minimum grant of \$6,000. Individual Cultural Affiliates (programs with a parent organization) are capped at one-third of the maximum grant, resulting in a Cultural Affiliate maximum of \$18,300. Grant amounts are redetermined annually, and as an organization's Formula Expenses and the agency's allocation to these programs fluctuate, the grant calculations will reflect the changes. For FY25 Portfolio grants, 114 organizations will see an increase, 93 organizations will see a decrease (including organizations that were at the previous maximum grant amount), and 30 will be unchanged.

In FY23 we implemented Equity Impact Points, which increase grant amounts for organizations representing communities that have frequently been disadvantaged in access to philanthropic support. BIPOC-Centered is a self-identification for organizations that are BIPOC led and/or run, and whose primary mission, programming and/or practices explicitly and specifically reflect and serve one or more communities that self-identify as BIPOC. Grant awards to these organizations reflect the additional weighting for BIPOC organizations.

For grantees of OGO, we have an added component. We have developed a Financial Health Analysis to identify organizations whose financial performance indicates that they are facing financial challenges. The Financial Health Impact Points are reflected in the grant recommendations for 23 organizations.

See **Appendix A** for additional details about reviewers and grant calculations. The list of awardees can be found in **Appendix B**.

If additional organizations that opt to pursue the Gaming Mitigation Fund grants instead of operating support, we will use the same methods described above to award grants to the next highest scoring organizations in each budget bracket. While we seek approval to make these awards prior to the next meeting, we will report on the final list of grantees at the next meeting for our reference.

These grants were recommended for approval by the Programs Committee at its meeting on October 16 and we request that the full Council approve the grants as described above.

Festivals & Projects

(Agenda Item 9cii)

To: Mass Cultural Council

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Kalyn King, Timothea Pham, Sara Glidden, Lisa Simmons

Dt: November 13, 2024

Re: FY25 Festivals & Projects Grant Recommendations

Overview

In August, we presented a preliminary funding scenario for the Mass Cultural Council's Festivals & Projects program for FY25. The approved FY25 Spending Plan includes an allocation of \$1,850,000 to support programs in the arts, humanities, or sciences that offer community and public benefits. We received 1,340 applications, an increase of 102 applications from FY24. The program will fund 740 grants this cycle (55% of the applications).

Updates to tentative funding list approved in August

Of the 740 organizations that were recommended and approved for funding in the FY25 cycle of Festivals & Projects, 220 of these awards have only tentatively approved, and had holds placed on their contracts – either because the organization needed to take action to resolve an issue, or because the organization also applied for Operating Grants for Organizations.

For FY25, organizations were allowed to apply for the Operating Grants for Organizations and the Festivals & Projects programs but would only receive funding from one. Of the original list of 740 organizations approved for funding in August:

- 103 were held pending the outcome of their Operating Grants for Organizations application.
 - 40 of these are recommended for OGO, and their F&P tentative award has been reassigned.
 - 63 will receive the \$2,500 award as previously approved.
- 117 were held organizations were given a deadline of September 30, 2024, to resolve any contracting issues.
 - 1 organization did not resolve their hold reason by the deadline.
 - 2 organizations notified Council staff that their projects had been canceled, and voluntarily canceled their grant.

Program staff allocated the 43 available awards to the grantees with the next highest scoring applications. Ties for the final awards were broken using County, to ensure equitable distribution of funds by geography.

Of the 740 grantees:

- 441 (60%) of the organizations have not received funding from us in the last three years, including previously unsuccessful applicants and new applicants.
- 215 (29%) are from BIPOC-Centered organizations.
- 349 (47%) programs place in a priority community.
- 104 (14%) applicants are participating in the Card to Culture program.
- 571 (77%) programs are listed as free to the public.

Each category has seen an increase from the last cycle in FY24.

A full list of grantees can be found in **Appendix C**.

This approach was recommended for approval by the Programs Committee at its meeting on October 16 and we request that the full Council approve the Festivals and Projects program as described above.

Creative Projects for Schools

(Agenda Item 9ciii)

To: Mass Cultural Council
 Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Erik Holmgren, Amu Chu, Käthe Swaback
 Dt: November 13, 2024
 Re: FY25 Program Update and Grant Recommendations

Summary. In early September we launched FY25 [Creative Projects for Schools](#). Creative Projects for Schools offers grants for school-based projects that foster creative learning experiences for K-12 students. In place of the STARS Residency program, we expanded the guidelines to include all types of projects including, but not limited to, residencies, field trips, performances, art showcases, poetry readings, mural projects, arts integration trainings, oral history projects, and more. Other eligibility changes included:

- \$5000 flat grant amount
- Individuals are no longer eligible to apply, though organizations could apply to work with individual teaching artists
- One grant application per applicant, one project hosted per school
- New prioritization points
 - Projects with a budget line item to pay the artist/teaching artist
 - BIPOC-Majority schools get an equivalent priority point to BIPOC centered orgs

We received 503 applications, of which 67 were ineligible for reasons in our guidelines, such as applicants only being allowed to submit one application for review and each school only being able to host one project. A total of 436 went forward for review, requesting a total of \$2,185,000. This is the largest number of applications the program has ever received.

Year and Grant	Number of Applications	Percent Increase from Previous Year
FY25 Creative Projects	503	20%
FY24 STARS Residencies	420	25%
FY23 STARS Residencies	335	-

Review Process

Aside from reviewing for eligibility, the review was defined by the four funding priorities. These priority criteria represented the full review for funding decisions, with staff reviewing only for eligibility. The criteria prioritized the following:

- **Projects** with schools in cities and towns that are below the state’s median household income and below statewide educational attainment. This includes but is not limited to places designated as Gateway Cities.
- **Projects** that hire and compensate Massachusetts artists, humanists and/or scientists.
- **Applicants** that have not received funding from Mass Cultural Council in the last three fiscal years (FY24, FY23, FY22), or that are applying to Mass Cultural Council for the first time.
- **BIPOC Centered Organizations or BIPOC Majority Schools**
 - **Organization applicants** that self-identify as led by and serving people of the global majority — Black, Indigenous, People of Color, Latinx, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and all other ethnicities of color. Learn more about the agency’s racial equity plan. Applicants wishing to make this BIPOC Centered Organization identification will need to fill out a form in the Agency’s grants management system.

OR

- **School Applicants** that are recognized by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) with a 2024-2025 DESE School ID with student populations that are 50% or more Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC) as reported by Data Source (2023-2024).

Grant Recommendations

We are recommending a list of 300 applications be funded for a total of \$1,500,000, the program allocation amount approved by the Council in August. The tie between applications that scored the same amount of priority criteria was broken by geographic distribution first and then random number.

This is the priority profile of recommended applications:

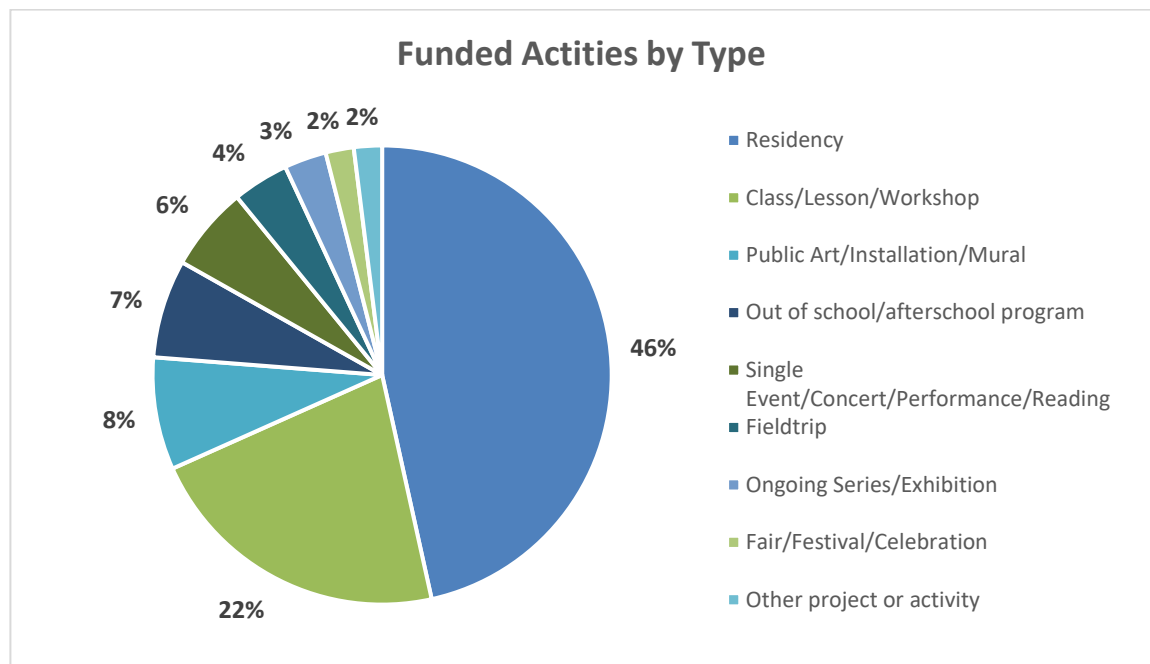
- BIPOC-majority schools or BIPOC-centered organizations: **180 (60%)**
- Schools in priority communities: **211(70%)**
- Projects that pay a Massachusetts artist, scientist, or humanist: **243 (81%)**

- Applications from schools and organizations that haven't received a Mass Cultural Council grant in past 3 fiscal years: **153 (51%)**

Due to the high volume of applications, all funded applications this year met at least two priority criteria. The 300 grants will reach more than 300 different schools, with some applications funding projects at multiple schools.

- **40 (13%)** grantees are first-time applicants to the agency.
- **58 (19%)** grantees are receiving their first grant from the agency.

Below is information about the type of activities being funded.



The list of awardees can be found in **Appendix D**.

This approach and these grants were recommended for approval by the Programs Committee at its meeting on October 16 and we request that the full Council approve the Creative Grants for Schools program as described above.

Cultural Districts Recommendations

(Agenda Item 9d)

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Carolyn Cole, Lisa Simmons
Dt: November 13, 2024
Re: Massachusetts Cultural District Initiative: Designations for Westfield, Holyoke and Watertown

Staff is requesting the Council agree to designate three new Cultural Districts as described below.

City of Westfield

We are pleased to submit a recommendation for the designation of the 56th cultural district for the City of Westfield. This designation has the potential to reinforce a strong history of an organized and engaged community focused on the local downtown and the role of arts and culture in economic development in the Greater Springfield region of Massachusetts.

The formal site visit for Westfield Cultural District took place on Wednesday, May 22, 2024. Attendees of the day's community-municipal convening, generously hosted by the City's Community Development Director, Peter Miller, and CDBG Coordinator, Michaela Grady, included Mayor Michael McCabe, City Councilor Bridget Matthews-Kane, Executive Committee Member and President of Westfield on Weekends (WOW), Bob Plasse, Executive Committee Member and Founder & President of ArtWorks Westfield, Bill Westerlind, Westfield State University's Interim Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Sabine Klein, Westfield Woman's Club representative, Kathi Palmer, Westfield Cultural Council member, Mary Ann Scognamiglio, and owner of Champagne Apothecary, Amber Champagne-Matos. Mass Cultural Council staff was accompanied on a walking tour of the proposed district by these local representatives and partners.

We would like to congratulate the City of Westfield, Peter Miller and Michaela Grady, on their efforts to pursue a state designated cultural district to honor their creative and cultural communities and to tie together their rich history of industrial work and educational institutions to their present artistic and cultural gems.

Special thanks to the local artists, arts organizations, and the Local Cultural Council and City officials who pursued this designation for ten years and developed this thoughtful and in-depth application.

Anita Lauricella was the site advisor for this assessment accompanied by Carolyn Cole and Sommers Smith, Program Officers with Mass Cultural Council's Communities team, as well as Charles G. Baldwin, Program Officer for Access and Inclusion and Mass Cultural Council's UP (Universal Participation) Initiative.

Excerpted from the site assessment report prepared by Anita:

"The City of Westfield has a rich cultural and historical heritage and has put significant effort into creating an attractive and inclusive downtown area."

"Investments in the streetscape have revitalized Elm Street, turning previously empty lots into dynamic spaces that add to the vibrant commercial atmosphere."

"The district has a well-thought-out management plan and a collaborative organizational model."

"The City's significant and strategic investments in infrastructure are visible when you enter the downtown corridor."

"It is an excellent time for the City to take this step and formally establish a district."

Thank you for our consideration of approval of the Watertown Cultural District.

City of Holyoke

We are pleased to submit a recommendation for the designation of the 57th cultural district for the City of Holyoke. A designation for this city would further inspiring works of art woven into the atmosphere, and collaborative programming and engagement, solidifying partnerships between local government and non-government organizations and stakeholders in our 'Little Puerto Rico' of the Greater Springfield region of Massachusetts.

The formal site visit for Holyoke Puerto Rican Cultural District took place on Monday, June 17, 2024. Attendees of the day's community-municipal convening, generously hosted by Stephanie Colón, Mass in Motion Coordinator for the City of Holyoke's Planning & Economic Development Office, and Kayla Rodriguez, Executive Director of Nueva Esperanza, Inc., included Mayor Joshua Garcia, Nilka Ortiz, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, Polo Delgado, City Inspector, Jenny Rivera, City Councilor Ward 1 and representative of Enlace, Jordan Hart, Executive Director of the Greater Holyoke Chamber, Juan Anderson-Burgos, City Councilor Ward 6 and (HOU) Legislative Aide to State Representative Patricia Duffy, Patricia Duffy (HOU) State Representative, Maribel Ortiz, Board Member of Nueva Esperanza, Inc., Alexandria Maysonet, representing the City Licensing Board, Tessa Murphy-Romboletti, City Councilor at Large and Executive Director of EforAll Holyoke/EparaTodos, Aaron Vega, Holyoke's Director of the Office of Planning and Economic Development, Israel Rivera, City Councilor at Large and Director of Families First, Jennifer Keitt, Senior Project Planner for the Office of Planning and Economic Development, Jonathan Moquin, Project Manager for the Department of Public Works, Nayroby Rosa, Director of Community Engagement and Resident Services for One Holyoke, Chris Fournier, Local Cultural Council representative, Carmen Ocasio, City Councilor Ward 2, Derek Baez, Peer Lead for MassHire Holyoke Career Center, and Imanol Cruz, Program Coordinator at MassHire Holyoke Career Center. Mass Cultural Council staff was accompanied on a dynamic and engaging waking tour of the proposed district by these local representatives and partners.

We would like to congratulate the City of Holyoke and the El Corazón Advisory Committee members on their efforts to pursue a state-designated Cultural district to honor and preserve their creative and cultural communities. Special thanks to Mayor Garcia and members of the City Council, Stephanie Colón and Kayla Rodriguez, the Greater Holyoke Chamber, Nueva Esperanza, Inc., City staff, members of the Local Cultural

Council and community members who guided us through 'the heart/ El Corazón' of their community and shared their exciting and inclusive vision for the Holyoke Puerto Rican Cultural District.

Anita Lauricella was the site advisor for this assessment accompanied by Carolyn Cole and Timothea Pham, Program Officers with Mass Cultural Council's Communities team.

Excerpted from the site assessment report prepared by Anita:

"[Holyoke's] distinctive organization, including a street grid, the prominence of the Connecticut River, canals, mill buildings, and the people who came to work and build the city, is what makes it unique today."

"The history, streetscape, murals, and public art create a strong, welcoming, and alive sense of place."

"The city has taken a proactive role in encouraging arts and culture by providing support for festivals, murals, and public art. The City has also encouraged outdoor dining and food trucks. This supports a local economy of restaurants and Latino-owned businesses."

"The city recognizes the opportunity its diverse community presents and is actively engaged in supporting it."

"The prominence of the Puerto Rican population has been a driver in creating a vibrant arts and culture scene for decades."

"The vision for the cultural district is to "dedicate a piece of the city to them" (Puerto Rican and Latino populations), revitalizing the community by allowing residents to feel autonomy by making the elements of art, culture, and food that provide the "enchantment" of Puerto Rico visible in their neighborhoods."

Thank you for our consideration of approval of the Watertown Cultural District.

City of Watertown

We are pleased to submit a recommendation for the designation of the 58th cultural district for the City of Watertown. This designation has the potential to solidify years of creative work and vital planning, allowing the community to create a lively and welcoming destination in the Greater Boston region of Massachusetts.

The formal site visit for Watertown Cultural District took place on Wednesday, April 10, 2024. Attendees of the day's community-municipal convening, generously hosted by the City's Public Arts & Culture Planner, Liz Helfer, included Darren Farrington, Director of the Mosesian Center for the Arts, Doug Orifice, Co-President of the Watertown Business Coalition, Jeannette Belcher-Schepis, Director of Development at the Mosesian Center for the Arts, Susan Jones, Artis, Stephanie Venizelos, Coordinator of Live Well Watertown, Yasmin Daikh, Vice President of Friends of Watertown Music, Madison Sorel, Executive Assistant at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Leah Kotok, Farm Educator at Gore Place, George Proakis, City Manager, and Gideon Schrieber, Director of Planning and Zoning, most of whom are members of the City's formalized Cultural District Partnership (CDP).

Mass Cultural Council staff was accompanied on a walking tour of the proposed district where we met additional members of the district's CDP including Kim Hewitt, Director of the Watertown Free Public Library and Theresa Maturevich, Assistant Director of the Watertown Free Public Library, Jason Sohigian, Director of the Armenian Museum of America, Marilynne Roach, President of the Historical Society of Watertown, Andrea Santopietro, Director of Watertown Cable Access Corp., and Ellen Wineberg Artist, and Owner of Storefront Art Project.

We would like to congratulate the City of Watertown, and Liz Helfer, on their efforts to pursue a state-designated cultural district to honor and preserve their creative and cultural communities. We also offer special thanks to the Local Cultural Council, City staff, and community members who shared their time and insight in preparation of this application and tour.

Anita Lauricella was the site advisor for this assessment accompanied by Carolyn Cole and Timothea Pham, Program Officers with Mass Cultural Council's Communities team.

Excerpted from the site assessment report prepared by Anita:

"The Watertown Cultural District Partnership has submitted a clearly articulated application outlining the available assets, programming, and plans."

"At the heart of the proposed cultural district, Watertown Square has excellent potential. It serves as a regional transportation and municipal hub and a small business center. The area is well-connected, with multiple MBTA bus routes and proximity to the Green Line and Commuter rail stops."

"The City's planning practices exemplify "collaborative" and multi-sector organizing models.

"[Their] strong planning with practical strategies for community engagement is an excellent foundation for a thriving cultural district."

Thank you for our consideration of approval of the Watertown Cultural District.