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Power of culture

COUNCIL MEETING BOOK

ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FIFTH MEETING

OF

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025

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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025

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ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FIFTH MEETING
OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025
10:00 AM-NOON

BROADCAST MEETING

MEETING WILL BE LIVESTREAMED AT
[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/LIVE/LR1XWC1NJ-8](https://www.youtube.com/live/LR1XWC1NJ-8)

MEETING MATERIALS WILL BE POSTED AT
[HTTPS://MASSCULTURALCOUNCIL.ORG/ABOUT/BOARD/](https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/board/)
UNDER "FEBRUARY 26, 2025 COUNCIL MEETING"

AGENDA VOTE

- 1. Call to Order- Open Meeting Law Notice
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
 - *David Slatery, Deputy Director (Open Meeting Law Notice)*
- 2. Welcome
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
- 3. Mission Moment Guest Speaker
 - *Cory Shea*
Director of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy
Town of Franklin
- 4. Minutes of 164th Council Meeting X
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
 - *David Slatery, Deputy Director (Reads the Roll)*
- 4. Chair Report
 - *Marc Carroll, Chair*
 - a. Compensation Approval X

- b. April 30- Creative Sector Day at the Massachusetts State House

- 5. Report from Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council (CPDAC)
 - *Julie Wake, Co-Chair Programs Committee and Member of CPDAC*

- 6. Executive Director Report
 - *Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director*
 - a. Executive Office
 - b. Advancement
 - c. Equity Progress

- 7. Public Affairs Report
 - *Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs*

- 8. Business Operations Update
 - *David Slatery, Deputy Director for Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Senior Director of Business Operations & CFO*

- 9. Program Operations Report
 - *Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations (unless otherwise noted)*
 - a. Updates
 - b. Samples of Submitted Work by Creative individuals
 - *Dan Blask, Program Manager, Artists Department*
 - c. Reminder re Conflict of Interest Notifications
 - *David Slatery, Deputy Director*
 - d. Additional FY25 Grant and Program Recommendations X
 - i. Gaming Mitigation Grants
 - ii. Cultural Investment Portfolio/ Operating Grants for Organizations
 - iii. Grants for Creative Individuals
 - iv. Poet Laureate

- 10. Adjourn



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025

RESOLUTIONS

Section 4- Minutes

RESOLVED: that the Council approves the minutes of the November 13, 2024 Council Meeting in the form presented.

Section 9 – Grant and Program Recommendations

RESOLVED: To approve the Gaming Mitigation Fund grants as presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve the final list of Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve the Grants for Creative Individuals as described and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To authorize up to \$15,000 of any grants previously approved this fiscal year but which funds were returned or cancelled and any other funds made available by any other party (and, to the extent such funds are insufficient, funds from Mass Cultural Council's general appropriation) to provide a grant to the Massachusetts Poet Laureate as chosen under Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Order 640 as described in the memo 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 FOURTH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Rhonda Anderson
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Donna Haghghat (arrived later)
Secretary Yvonne Hao
Cecil Barron Jensen
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, Christian Kelly, Sara Glidden, Erik Holmgren, Lisa Simmons, and Lindiana Flores; New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill Executive Director Grace Elton; Mayor Michael McCabe and Peter Miller of Westfield; Stephanie Colon and Kalya Rodriguez of Holyoke; and Doug Orifice and Kristen Kenny of Watertown.

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 12:13PM and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

After David read the statement, the Chair welcomed Council Members, staff, and guests to the meeting. He then invited New England Botanic Garden (NEBG) at Tower Hill Executive Director Grace Elton to say a few words. Grace welcomed the Council and told them about the mission and current exhibitions and projects of NEBG.

Prepared on 12/31/24

The Chair then let Council Members know Governor Maura Healey had provided a video address for the meeting, and he asked staff to play it. In her message the Governor charged the Council with taking bold action to continue the Agency's work of fostering a creative, equitable, vibrant cultural sector across Massachusetts.

The Chair then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the August 22, 2024 Council Meeting included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve them. Mark Snyder moved to approve the minutes and Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that David Kong, Petrina Martin, Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Donna Haghighat and Anika Lopes were absent, and Secretary Yvonne Hao abstained it was

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the August 22, 2024 Council Meeting in the form presented.

Chair's Report

The Chair thanked the Council for their work together and within their committees; explaining that he recently changed the name of the Grants Committee to the Programs Committee to more closely align the Committee with the Agency's strategic priorities. Grant making will continue to be a significant part of the work of Mass Cultural Council, and approving grants will continue to be the main part of the Committee's work. However, it's becoming clear the Agency can have enormous value even to those who do not receive direct grant funding. This shift in the name to Programs Committee will signal a new outlook and will deepen the engagement of the Committee and its members to become thought partners and advisors. Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis, who previously served as Chair of the Grants Committee, echoed Chair Marc Carroll's remarks and added that this will enable Committee Members to advise on the full depth and breadth of the Agency's work. Julie Wake who serves as Co-Chair of the Programs Committee agreed the change made by the Chair beautifully aligns with the mission of the Committee and will enhance the work and focus of its members.

The Chair then encouraged Council Members to connect with their Board Buddies and said that he would like to see more opportunities for Council Members to network and connect; he believes the collective expertise of the Council is strong and that more connection will foster new ideas and bolster the Agency as it pursues its goals.

He added that having a meeting in person provides an opportunity to connect and conduct business and to explore a Massachusetts cultural organization. He again thanked Grace and her team for hosting the Council at NEBG. The next full Council Meeting in February will be virtual, held via Zoom, and the Council will meet again in person in April for its Council Retreat – this will be held at the Massachusetts State House in Boston.

The Chair stated that Mass Cultural Council is in compliance with the Massachusetts Public Meeting Law which currently allows for some meetings to be held virtually. Should the requirements of the law change, the Council will be updated as soon as possible. At meetings slated to take place in person, virtual participation will be made available upon any request for access accommodations.

That concluded the Chair's report and there were no questions. The Chair then asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his report.

Executive Director's Report

Michael began by congratulating Ché Anderson who recently ran the New York City Marathon. The Advancement Committee, of which Ché is Co-Chair, met in mid-October and discussed the Agency's growing Advancement efforts. Offers have been made for two new full-time Advancement staff positions; a public announcement will be made in the coming weeks once offers have been accepted. The most immediate goal of the new Advancement team, which will be led by Deputy Executive Director David Slatery, is to build the infrastructure for the Agency's Advancement work: outlining goals, researching relationship and project management tools, developing internal and external communication strategies, and professional development. Michael then shared a brief list of recent meetings and events he and David participated in with an eye towards pursuing Advancement goals.

Michael shared that Civic Moxie has been engaged as a consultant for the Agency's redesign of its Cultural Districts Initiative. A task force has been formed and includes leaders of both independent and Executive branch state agencies as well as representatives from the private sector.

He then took a moment and introduced Lindiana Flores, a new full-time staff member on the Programs Team. Lindiana's primary focus is supporting Operating Grants for Organizations and the Card to Culture program. She worked previously at the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the City of Worcester's Cultural Development division. She is also the owner and Executive Director of Raices Latin Dance.

Michael then gave an update on two national conferences at which Mass Cultural Council was invited to present: the Grantmakers in the Arts conference where Michael spoke on a panel about cross-sector policy work and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies where Michael and Art Pharmacy Chief Executive Officer Chris Appleton spoke to a packed room about the Agency's arts-based social prescription work. Both engagements yielded new connections and learning and raised awareness nationally of the work being done in Massachusetts.

Michael let Council Members know that an equity report is included in their meeting materials. Guided by the d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan, Mass Cultural Council has contracted a screen reader user/expert to test the accessibility of changes made to the creative employment website, Hireculture.org. The Tribal Cultural Council program has launched with the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Council as the first Council ready to take applications. Michael anticipates more Tribal Cultural Council's being established in early 2025. Additionally, the Arts & Cultural Accessibility Self-Assessment tool is now available, and UP organizations have been notified that they will complete that part of their participation in the UP program this year. A webinar with Open Door Arts to promote this new tool is scheduled for early December.

All funds for the MITx program have been raised. Content creation will begin in the spring, with filming to begin in the summer and a launch planned for January 2026. Michael then asked Program Manager Erik Holmgren to give a brief update on the Agency's arts-based social prescription work.

Erik shared that social prescription continues to grow. In the first two months of the fiscal year Art Pharmacy received 153 prescriptions. In the last two months that number doubled to approximately 300 prescriptions. In addition, Council Member Petrina Martin helped staff arrange a meeting with the heads of several departments at Boston Medical Center to provide a briefing on social prescription work. Art Pharmacy has been able to secure approval from the Commonwealth to use Opioid Settlement funds for social prescription in Franklin, MA, though a connection with a Local Cultural Council member. Finally, Boston Children's Hospital is currently engaged with Art Pharmacy in some promising discussions.

The Chair asked Erik if the doubling of social prescriptions was expected or came as a surprise; Erik explained that it is a very positive development but is in keeping with the growth staff has seen. There is much enthusiasm for the work.

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

Public Affairs Report

Bethann shared the good news that the Economic Development Bond Bill known as the Mass Leads Act which includes several elements of interest to Mass Cultural Council was passed the previous evening.

Secretary Yvonne Hao, who is a Council Member *and* serves as the Secretary of Economic Development, was present and voiced her excitement and gratitude that this legislation is moving ahead as it will greatly benefit the creative economy including the Cultural Facilities Fund.

A celebration of Operating Grants for Organizations will be held on December 2nd at the Heritage Museums & Gardens and all Council Members are invited to attend.

MASSCreative's annual Advocacy Day at the Massachusetts State House will take place on April 30th – the same day the Council is scheduled to meet and have its retreat. As such, the meeting and retreat will be held at the Massachusetts State House.

There were no questions for Bethann. The Chair asked Senior Director of Business Operations and Chief Financial Officer Catherine Cheng-Anderson for her update.

Business Operations Report

Catherine let Council Members know that she had revised the Agency's Internal Control Plan. The new plan was distributed to staff earlier in November. Stating that 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 compliance with State Finance Law and Comptroller Policies. Catherine stated 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.

The agency is four months into the fiscal year, and 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.

There were no questions for Catherine. The Chair let Council Members know that there would be a 10-minute break.

Presentation: Creative Sector Inventory

The Chair welcomed Council Members back and asked Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless to introduce the next presentation. Jen introduced Teresa Nelson of Diversity North, who led a cultural asset inventory project for the agency and was there to share the results of that work with the Council. Teresa shared a robust data presentation and analysis of the data. A copy of that presentation is available on request.

Following the presentation there was a brief discussion by the Council. Members asked for clarity on what the term artist meant in the context of the study; Teresa explained that it was a broad term encompassing many art forms. The Council also discussed how the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences are defined, Teresa agreed to follow up with the definition used during the data collection. There was a brief discussion about looking at the data by county; Teresa confirmed that it is possible to explore the data using that metric. Council Members asked if part-time and unpaid workers were included in the data collection and Teresa clarified that workers who identified as an artist as their primary professional identity were included regardless of whether that work was part-time, paid, or unpaid. It was also clarified that arts administrators are considered cultural workers. Finally, the Council discussed how the data might be used. Michael shared that what is clear based on even the initial review of the data is that there is a need in the cultural sector that Mass Cultural Council likely cannot fulfill just through grantmaking; and this is why the Agency is prioritizing advancement work.

That concluded the presentation by Teresa Nelson of Diversity North.

The Chair moved to the next item on the agenda: the designation of new Cultural Districts. Program Manager Lisa Simmons gave a presentation on each of the three districts being considered for designation: the Downtown Westfield Cultural District, Holyoke Puerto Rican Cultural District, and Watertown Cultural District. A copy of the presentation is available on request. After the presentation, Allyce Najimy asked if the staff ever convened the Cultural Districts and Lisa confirmed that this is done monthly via Zoom. There were no further questions.

The Chair asked for a motion to approve the designation of the three new Cultural Districts. Mark Snyder moved to approve the designations; Diane Asadorian Masters seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that David Kong, Anika Lopes, Petrina Martin, and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were absent it was unanimously

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

Following the vote, representatives from each of the three newly designated districts spoke briefly to the Council. They expressed their gratitude for the Council's unanimous vote and shared briefly what their plans were for the districts. In attendance were Mayor Michael McCabe of Westfield who was joined by Peter Miller; Stephanie Colon and Kalya Rodriguez of Holyoke; and Doug Orifice and Kristen Kenny of Watertown.

The Chair asked Jen to introduce the final item on the agenda: additional FY25 grant and program recommendations including grants for the Cultural Investment Portfolio and Operating Grants for Organizations; Festivals & Projects; and Creative Projects for Schools. Jen gave a brief overview of all three programs and let the Council know the Programs Committee had voted to recommend the allocations at its last meeting. Programs Committee Co-Chair Julie Wake shared that the Programs Committee had indeed had a thoughtful discussion about the grants and found them to align with the Agency's mission and strategic priorities; they unanimously voted to recommend the grants to the full Council. There were no questions. David briefly reminded the Council of the Conflicts of Interest list included in their materials and asked if there were any updates to it. There were none. The Chair asked for a motion to approve the grant and program recommendations. Mark Snyder moved to approve the recommendations; Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that David Kong, Anika Lopes, Petrina Martin, Emily Bramhall, Ellice Patterson and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent, and that Ashley Occhino abstained it was

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

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 Haghighat

- a. WAM Theater

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

Ashley Occhino

- a. Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition/One South Coast Community Foundation
- b. Southeastern Massachusetts Visitors Bureau
- c. SouthCoast Community Foundation
- d. Society of Arts and Crafts

There were no further comments or questions, and the Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:54pm.



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EXECUTIVE OFFICE UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2025

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

Executive Committee. The Executive Committee met on February 12 and approved the agenda for today's Council Meeting. The Committee also plans to meet again on February 25 in advance of the Council Meeting.

Programs Committee. The Programs Committee also met on February 12 and heard an in-depth presentation on the Cultural District Initiative Redesign project and voted to make the grant and program recommendations contained in section 9d of today's Council Meeting materials.

Advancement Committee. The Advancement Committee met on February 5, where it reviewed the Agency's advancement efforts and ideas concerning future award celebrations.

Conflict of Interest Notifications. Similar to the August and November Committee and Council Meetings, since the February 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 the Appendices to this Council Meeting Book.

On the Blog

Michael will have a regular column on the Agency's Power of Culture blog, publishing one to two times each month. His first post, [The Work Continues: Reaffirming Our Values](#), clarified this year's grantmaking and reaffirmed the Agency's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in light of ongoing changes and developments within the federal government.



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ADVANCEMENT TEAM UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2025

Building an asset-based approach to the Mass Cultural Council

The Advancement Team has been focused on building the infrastructure for the new Advancement work at the agency. Before drafting our initial plans to define, communicate, implement, and evaluate this work, each program team was consulted to understand their vision of success, their unique collective assets, and their needs.

Cultural District Redesign

- CivicMoxie hired as consultants
- Feedback Collected
 - 55 Cultural Districts Surveyed
 - 10 Partner Interviews
 - Staff Interviews
 - Seven Focus Groups
- Statewide Cross-Sector Task Force representing 24+ state agencies, quasi-governmental offices, and nonprofit entities
 - Collaborative Metrics Data Outlet & Collective Program Input
 - Plans for Ongoing Consortium Collaboration & Communication

Arts Prescription

Partnerships are growing:

- 430 Organizations in network, 401 prescriptions written, 77% attendance rate, and 126 arts organizations referred
- United Health Care national corporate office is supporting expansion
- Two dual eligible Medicare/Medicaid plans have incorporated social prescription into their 2025 plans
- Opioid Recovery funds in use in Franklin Massachusetts
- Department of Public Health program in Springfield targeting seniors of color is under development
- Dana Farber Center for Integrative Medicine is in talks with Art Pharmacy

New Data on the Impact of Social Prescription from Canada

A savings of \$4.43 is achieved for every dollar invested in social prescribing.

Additionally, estimated savings include:

- \$296M savings in annual costs from reduced hospital admissions and emergency visits
- \$114M in annual cost savings from reduced primary care visits
- \$59.9M annual increase in employment income for youth with depressive symptoms
- 16,900 fewer cases of coronary artery disease
- 2,000 fewer cases of avoidable deaths.



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EQUITY PROGRESS REPORT

FEBRUARY 26, 2025

NEW EQUITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- We continue working with a Screen Reader User Expert to test accessibility improvements on [HireCulture.org](#), our creative employment website. This initiative aligns with our [d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan](#)
- Together, the Public Affairs and Program Teams are collaborating to create a resource guide and training session for all employees on how to create accessible documents. This effort supports our commitment to making all materials usable for diverse audiences and reinforces our plan's goals.
- We are finalizing scopes of work for both the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee and the d/Deaf & Disability Advisory Committee. Invitations will go out to potential members in the coming weeks.

SECTOR EDUCATION, SERVICES & ACHIEVEMENT

- Public Affairs continues its successful media partnership with El Planeta to ensure proactive external communications and outreach to Spanish speaking potential grantees, promoting both our funding opportunities and the investments made in this community by the Agency.
- In December the Public Affairs team hosted a [Spotlight Series](#) webinar for members of the creative and cultural sector with Open Door Arts to promote their Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment tool.

PROGRAMS

- UP Innovation & Learning Network (ILN) redesign update: We are still working with our partners Open Door Arts to build a foundation for the future UP Program work. The [Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment](#) tool is available to all organizations for free. UP Organizations are required to complete it as part of their grant requirements. Additionally, organizations that complete it will get funding priority points on their Operating Grants for Organizations application. Open Door Arts is working on a learning hub that we have funded as a core part of our future UP ILN and re-envisioned UP Designation.

- The [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Cultural Council](#) announced their inaugural grant cycle with 8 grantees and plans for their own council programming.

INTERNAL

- As a part of Public Affairs' ongoing efforts to depict diverse cultural activities across Massachusetts, we recently worked to secure high-quality images of various cultural events in Massachusetts, including:
 - [Gateway Arts 2024 Holiday Market](#) which showcased the work of adult artists with disabilities.
 - [Origins of the eternal art of the Maya](#) presented by traditional artist and educator, Rosalba Solis.
- In April all staff will take part in an Anti-Ableist training as part of our continued internal learning.



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2025

Budget/Legislative/Advocacy Report

- The 194th General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts began the 2025-2026 legislative session on January 1. Thousands of bills have been filed for consideration, and the Governor officially kicked off the Fiscal Year 2026 budget drafting process as she released her spending recommendations, [H. 1](#), on January 22. Mass Cultural Council is excited to begin conversations with House and Senate Members about matters of importance to the cultural sector as hearings are scheduled and debates are occurring.
- Mass Cultural Council is working with partners in the House and Senate on two bills that we authored and are now under consideration, and will present these ideas during a Creative Sector Policy Briefing we are jointly hosting at the State House on March 4 with MASSCreative and MAPC:
 - SD 2045 An Act [clarifying eligibility to the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund](#) – sponsored by Sen. Paul Mark.
 - HD 2135 An Act [advancing Massachusetts from STEM to STEAM](#) – sponsored by Rep. Mindy Domb.
- The Governor’s FY26 [H. 1](#) recommended a small, 0.58% increase to Mass Cultural Council’s current FY25 operating budget. We anticipate a hearing date in March and look forward to continued discussions with the House and Senate Committees on Ways & Means and other legislative offices regarding our \$28 million funding request. The House of Representatives budget debate occurs in April; the Senate follows with their budget deliberations in May. FY26 begins on July 1.

Events/Communications/Digital Communications Report

Events

- Mass Cultural Council hosted two in-person events since last November, connecting with members of the sector and celebrating grant award decisions:

- *Operating Grants for Organizations Grants Celebration* at Heritage Museums & Gardens in Sandwich (December 2, 2024)
- *Cultural District Investment Grant Celebration* at the Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Lowell (February 13, 2025)
- We continue to amplify awareness of additional resources to the sector through our virtual [Spotlight Series](#):
 - The [Mass Office of Travel and Tourism](#) will provide another update and overview of MA250 for the cultural sector, including information about how to get involved (March 6)
- Save the Date: The Public Affairs team is working with internal and external partners to prepare for several upcoming events. Please email Bethann Steiner for additional details if you wish to attend. Council members are warmly welcome to attend and participate in all our convenings!
 - *Creative Sector Policy Briefing for Legislators and Staff* – State House, Room 428 (March 4 at 1pm)
 - *Cultural Asset Inventory Briefing for Legislators and Staff* – State House, Room 437 (March 13 at 2:30pm)
 - *Cultural Asset Inventory Virtual Lunch & Learn Briefing* – Webinar (March 20 at 12pm)
 - *Cultural Asset Inventory Virtual Briefing* – Webinar (March 25 at 4pm)
 - *Poetry Out Loud Massachusetts 20th Anniversary Celebration* – State House, Room 428 (April 15 in the morning)
 - *Creative Sector Advocacy Day at the State House* – State House, Great Hall (April 30 at 9am)
 - *Grants for Creative Individuals Award Celebration* – State House, Great Hall (May 19 at 1pm)

Media/Community Relations

Our ongoing partnership with El Planeta has resulted in coverage of our FY25 grant programs to the Commonwealth's Spanish-speaking media markets:

- Gaming Mitigation Fund: [Mass Cultural Council anunció el programa de Mitigación de Apuestas para centros de artes escénicas municipales y sin fines de lucro](#) (December 9, 2024).
- Festivals and Projects: [Mass Cultural Council otorgó 740 subvenciones a festivales y proyectos para expandir las actividades culturales en Massachusetts](#) (January 27, 2025).
- El Planeta published an article on our most recent YouthReach grants: [Mass Cultural Council brindó apoyo a jóvenes en 85 organizaciones en todo el estado a través del programa YouthReach](#) (February 14, 2025)

Also, as part of our sector-wide photography efforts, we featured:

- [Gateway Arts 2024 Holiday Market](#) which showcased the work of adult artists with disabilities.
- [Origins of the eternal art of the Maya](#) presented by traditional artist and educator, Rosalba Solis.

WEB

Updated the web site in support of Agency activities, including:

- [Funding lists for individual LCCs](#) and the Agency's direct grant programs.
- Program guidelines for Gaming Mitigation Fund, YouthReach, and Operating Grants for Organizations.
- A web presence for a new [The Rural Municipalities Toolkit](#), a collection of accessible, supportive resources for cities and towns interested in bolstering their creative community and economic development.

BLOG

- Published [28 blog posts](#) in the last quarter, in partnership with Program and Operations staff, to amplify and document the Agency's work.

ENEWSLETTERS

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

- [Power of Culture's](#) subscriber list rose by 1,782. Open rates averaged 54%.
- [Community Initiative News'](#) list rose by 444. Open rates averaged 53%.
- [Artist News'](#) list rose by 306. Open rates averaged 54%.



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BUSINESS OPERATIONS UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2025

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER UPDATE

1. As of February, we are seven months into fiscal year 2025. The latest spending included below shows that our contracting, grant payments, and project launches remain on target. Current spending trends align with projections, and we anticipate a steady increase through the remainder of the fiscal year.
2. [Mass Cultural Council has been awarded a \\$1,209,900 grant](#) from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), with \$800,000 received as of January 28, 2025. Our progress report was submitted ahead of schedule, and we have formally requested the remaining \$409,900. We anticipate the federal government will disburse these funds by fiscal year-end, based on current indicators. We continue to closely monitor the situation and will provide updates as new information becomes available.
3. We received a routine audit request from the State Auditor's Office and are providing the necessary information. The audit is focused on MCC's oversight of local cultural councils, compliance with 962 CMR 2.10, and follow-ups on the 2022 audit for the period of July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2024. The Auditor's Office will first conduct a desk review before determining whether to proceed with a full audit. We will keep the Board informed of any updates.
4. All staff members have completed a two-hour cybersecurity training course, reinforcing our commitment to a strong cybersecurity awareness culture. We appreciate staff engagement in this effort and will continue prioritizing safeguarding the agency's assets. This mandate aligns with recommendations from the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security, the Office of the State Comptroller, and the Office of the Massachusetts State Auditor.

SPENDING HIGHLIGHTS

1. This summary presents a comparison between the Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of January 31, 2025, encompassing our core appropriation.

Total Council Approved Budget Allocations (Core): 26,920,800
 Total Expenses as of 1/31/25 (Core): 14,323,538

EXPENSES	STATE FUNDING	EXPENSES AS OF 1/31/25	% OF BUDGET EXPENDED	SPENDING PROJECTION 1/31/25
AA: SALARY	4,114,759	2,445,018	59%	4,093,643
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	55,328	26,255	47%	57,146
CC: CONTRACT STAFF	-	-		-
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	66,654	34,172	51%	66,317
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	199,748	48,311	24%	199,748
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	296,675	199,123	67%	296,675
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	193,774	63,890	33%	208,774
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	293,350	35,005	12%	291,171
KK: NON-IT EQUIPMENT	2,200	-	0%	2,200
LL: LEASES	7,444	4,009	54%	7,444
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS	20,426,628	10,483,745	51%	20,426,628
PP: LEGISLATIVE EARMARKS	955,000	800,000	84%	955,000
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	309,240	184,010	60%	316,054
TOTAL EXPENSES	26,920,800	14,323,538	53%	26,920,800

2. This summary presents a comparison between Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of January 31, 2025, encompassing both core appropriation and additional funding sources.

Total Council Approved Budget Allocations (All sources): 33,971,886
 Total Expenses as of 1/31/25 (All Sources): 16,376,540

EXPENSES	TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENSES (ALL FUNDING SOURCES)	EXPENSES AS OF 1/31/25	% OF BUDGET EXPENDED	SPENDING PROJECTION ALL FUNDING SOURCES
AA: SALARY	4,552,046	2,445,018	54%	4,530,930
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	60,725	26,255	43%	62,543
CC: CONTRACT STAFF	-	-	0%	-
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	263,657	34,172	13%	263,320
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	249,099	50,343	20%	249,099
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	352,010	199,123	57%	352,010
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	228,505	84,212	37%	243,505
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	333,350	35,005	11%	331,171
KK: NON-IT EQUIPMENT	2,200	-	0%	2,200
LL: LEASES	9,299	4,936	53%	9,299
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS	26,655,713	12,513,465	47%	26,655,713
PP: LEGISLATIVE EARMARKS	955,000	800,000	84%	955,000
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	310,283	184,010	59%	317,097
TOTAL EXPENSES	33,971,886	16,376,540	48%	33,971,886

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



Power of culture

PROGRAM UPDATE FEBRUARY 2025

Program Consolidation Update

To support the simplification of internal administration of programs and improve the constituent experience since FY21 almost all of our programs have been redesigned and/or consolidated. Our goal was to have fewer programs but to serve as many or more grantees. Additionally, eligibility was broadened so that we could continue to serve our current constituents and reach new constituencies as well. The following shows how the programs have been consolidated from FY21 to FY25:

FY21 (18 Programs)

- CIP Portfolio
- CIP Gateway
- CIP Projects
- Festivals
- STARS Residencies
- UP LEAD Professional Development Grants
- UP Awards
- UP Innovation Fund
- UP Designation & Innovation and Learning Network
- YouthReach
- Cultural Facilities Fund
- Gaming Mitigation Fund
- Local Cultural Council Program
- Cultural District Initiative & Grants
- Card to Culture
- Social Prescription
- Traditional Arts Apprenticeships
- Artist Fellowships

FY26 (11 Programs)

- Operating Grants for Organizations
- Creative Experiences
- UP Innovation Fund
- UP Designation & Innovation and Learning Network*
- YouthReach
- Cultural Facilities Fund
- Gaming Mitigation Fund
- Tribal & LCC Program
- Cultural District Initiative & Grants*
- Card to Culture
- Grants for Creative Individuals

*The two programs with asterisks are in the process of being redesigned.

Despite these program consolidations we are reaching more organizations and Individuals than we did in FY21. The figures below exclude any pandemic related funding:

Number of individuals funded in FY21: 101
Number of individuals funded in FY25: 435

- 330% increase

Number of organizations funded in FY21: 1,162
Number of organizations funded in FY25 *so far*: 1,824

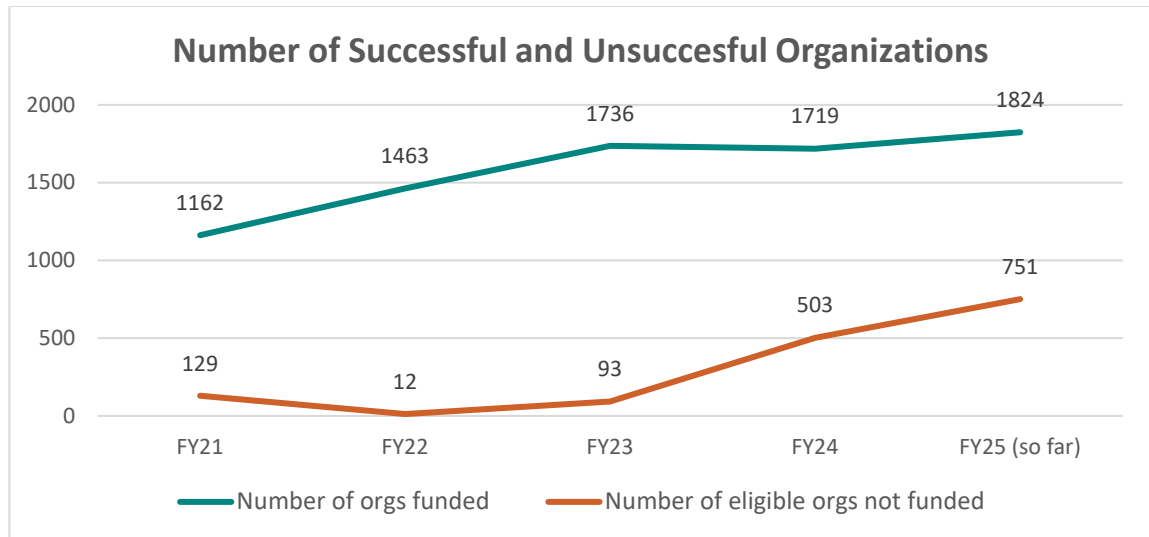
- 57% increase

For context, during that time our State Appropriation increased from \$18,180,000 in FY21 to \$26,850,000 in FY25, a 48% increase. Also, during that time, we increased the smallest grant organizations received from \$500 in FY21 to \$2,500 in FY25, a 400% increase. However, in order to reach more individuals, the maximum award was decreased from \$15,000 to \$5,000, a 66% decrease.

Advancing Equity and Extending Our Reach. Much of the consolidation work was done to support our equity goals, Mass Cultural Council has expanded the organizations we reach through recruitment and outreach. Because our applications have been simplified and streamlined and eligibility has been expanded over the past 4 years, we have seen a steady increase in applications from organizations in the cultural sector.

In FY25 we received a total of 19,379 applications through our system in FY25 (including applications to LCCs), a 4% decrease from FY24 (20,226) and a 61% increase compared to FY21 (12,038). Despite the increases to our budget, and an increase in the grantees we are serving, we have had to turn away an increasing number of organizations.

The following chart shows the number of funded organizations and the number of organizations that applied and received no funding per year. It excludes all pandemic related grants so that each year is easier to compare. Additionally, the FY25 award number does not include Gaming, CFF, and some final OGO/Cip awards, as those have not been finalized.



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 three fiscal years. Looking ahead to FY26, we anticipate:

- Cultural Facilities Fund: 2-year wait period for successful Capital Grant recipients.
- Organizations can only receive one of the following grants:
 - Creative Experiences
 - Cultural Investment Portfolio(CIP)/Operating Grants for Organizations(OGO)
 - Gaming Mitigation
 - Cultural District Investment Grant

And some organizations receiving both YouthReach and operating support will be allowed to receive both for a final year up to a capped amount due to the delay in the reopening of YouthReach. More below.

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.

Grant Cycle Realignment

To better manage the significant increase in applications, balance workload, make space for our advancement work we have shifted some of our programs to take in applications every other year, vs every year. To support this shift, we are also moving the OGO awards from 5-year awards to 4-year and YouthReach from 3-year to 4-year as well.

Annual Application Cycles:

- Cultural Facilities Fund

- Tribal and Local Cultural Council Program
- Creative Experiences
- Grants for Creative Individuals

Biannual Application Cycles:

- Operating Grants for Organizations
- Gaming Mitigation Fund
- YouthReach

Upcoming FY26 Program Dates. You will be notified about the following FY26 programs and guidelines as they launch, but we wanted to let you know what is coming down the pipeline:

[Operating Grants for Organizations](#)

Open Now, Deadline: April 17, 2025

Unrestricted general operating grants for Massachusetts-based, nonprofit cultural organizations with year-round operations offering public programming in the arts, humanities, or sciences. Grants start at \$6,000.

[Creative Experiences](#)

Opens: March 4, 2025, Deadline: April 30, 2025

NEW: Grants to organizations (including schools) to fund festivals, projects, residencies, and other cultural activities in the arts, humanities, and sciences. This program combines Festivals & Projects and Creative Projects for Schools into one program.

[YouthReach](#)

While we had hoped to reopen YouthReach for FY26 funding, due to program changes, realignment of grant cycles, and staff changes, we will have decided to delay the reopening for one year.

We hope to announce an FY27 round of funding with updated guidelines in early 2026. In the meantime, we will encourage interested organizations to apply for Operating Grants for Organizations or Creative Experiences.

Most FY25 YouthReach grantees are eligible for a one-year extension of their current funding.

Program Updates. Updates from each of the various program teams.

[Access & Inclusion](#)

Charles Baldwin

- o Advancement: Howe Center for Innovation at Perkins, Mass Housing training, ARC Mass resources, Disability Incubator, NEA and NEFA SAA ADA Coordinators, Mass Ability Employment reviews
- o Open Door Arts Partnership: Self-Assessment tool and Access Hub Development
 - OGO Priority Point is a 1st step. Redefining UP, promoting the assessment, working on getting external input on how to best recognize/support orgs doing this work = a multi-year process.
 - <https://www.artsaccessresources.org/>
- o UP Initiative – funding/cohort still ongoing
 - 92 organizations granted \$5k each with participation in self-assessment tools as criteria; 1 organization abstained. UP org results to be submitted with Final Reports. >>> FY26: submission of access plans.
- o Lincoln Center Inclusive Hiring Cohort -21 organizations, learning module on practical inclusion of people with intellectual or brain based disabilities. Guidance on expectations, mentorship, measurements, and modifications. Will keep this cohort on workforce development ongoing with quarterly check-ins and grantee learning opportunities.
- o Cultural District redesign: participation and counsel
- o Disability Equity Plan – Disability Advisory Board: thru FY26 >>> review and establish funding priorities and the development of Access accountability measures (what is success).
 - User/expert web review (HireCulture - Public Affairs)
 - Accessible document training (Programs)
 - Ant Ableist training (Operations)
- o Access Office Hours: organizational counsel and effective practice for grantees
 - Feb 18: Assistive Tech
 - Mar 18: Venue/Producer, Artist – Who's responsible?
 - April 15: Jobs and Inclusive Hiring
 - May 13: Marketing and Communications
 - June 3: Emergency Preparedness

Artists & Youth

Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Amy Chu, Summer Confuorto, Käthe Swaback

In November Erik Holmgren moved from the Programs Area to Advancement in the Executive office. On the Creative Youth Development/Education (CYD/E) team, Erik, Käthe Swaback and Amy Chu had been working to support young

people in Creative Youth Development (CYD) and in schools as well as working on workforce development, and arts and health, and more. Through several conversations, it became clear that our work with youth and our work with artists had a lot of natural overlap – teaching artists, workforce development, the importance of arts in mental and physical health, etc.

As such, Käthe and Amy will be joining Dan, Kelly, and Summer on the new Artists & Youth team. Each person will continue their important work in their areas of expertise, but this new alignment creates an exciting space for stronger collaboration and new energy. This team will focus on the individual—from childhood through adulthood—while still working closely with organizations and communities as key partners across Programs and the agency.

Grants for Creative Individuals. Please see our FY25 recommendations for Grants for Creative Individuals below.

Massachusetts Poet Laureate. On February 3, 2025, Governor Maura Healey signed [Executive Order no. 640](#) creating the Poet Laureate position in Massachusetts.

The goal is to announce the inaugural Poet Laureate in late May, and the process is already underway. Staff sent the Governor's Office our recommendations on the Governor-appointed Poet Laureate Nominating Committee. We are currently designing an open application process and plan to open the program to applicants in March, with an April application deadline.

Please see the Poet Laureate memo below for more information, including our recommendation for a grant to support the selected laureate.

Advancement for Artists. The following represents the Artist Team's ongoing work to advance the creative and cultural sector.

- Ongoing partnership with Governor's Office to exhibit Massachusetts artists in the Governor's waiting room at the State House, including Native American and Black artists to honor Native American Heritage Month and Black History Month.
- Summer Confuorto from the Artists Team has been working with the New England Foundation for Arts, advising on the development of guidelines for new program called Walking Together: Investing in Folklife in Communities of Color, which supports folklife and traditional arts rooted in communities of color.
- Preparing to collaborate with the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities on a capital grant program to create art installations at 5 to 8 Local Housing Authorities. We will offer feedback on the guidelines and guidance for working with artists on public projects.

Below is an update of our CYD/E team for FY25 including YouthReach, Creative Projects for Schools integrating into Creative Experiences, CultureRx, and the Youth Arts Impact Network.

YouthReach. As mentioned above, YouthReach will not reopen in FY26. While our FY26 spending plan has not been finalized, and barring budget decreases, we recommend that YouthReach organizations who have NOT received funding from OGO, CIP, or Gaming Mitigation in FY25 will be eligible for a YouthReach extension grant. Our FY26 [YouthReach Extension Grant Guidelines](#) outline how YouthReach organizations who currently receive funding from OGO/CIP or Gaming Mitigation in FY25 can receive OGO/CIP and YouthReach, or Gaming Mitigation and YouthReach in FY26 up to our maximum grant amount set for FY26. Those who have maximums at the capped amount will not be eligible for the YouthReach Extension Grant. All YouthReach grantees will need to apply to the new YouthReach program in 2026 to be considered for multi-year funding, beginning in FY27. These applications will be open every other year going forward (for a more complete understanding of YouthReach see our recent [Blog Post](#) and YouthReach Final Report for FY24 - "[Create, Connect, Catalyze: YouthReach in FY24](#)")

Creative Projects for Schools. Creative Projects for Schools offers \$5,000 grants for school-based projects that foster creative learning experiences for K-12 students. In November, we notified about 500 applicants and 300 grantees about their Creative Projects for Schools grant. This was the first year that we funded all types of projects in schools, including residencies, field trips, performances, workshops, art installations, and more.

In January, we teamed up with the fiscal team to deliver an information session about our contracting process, as many of the Creative Projects grantees are new to our programs, with many applying as principals, classroom teachers, or PTOs. This Spring, Creative Projects is integrating into the all-encompassing program, Creative Experiences.

Creative Experiences. Creative Experiences opens this March to all types of organizations putting on experiences incorporating the arts, humanities, and sciences for people in Massachusetts. Considering what was originally the Festivals & Projects and Creative Projects for Schools/STARs programs, staff came out of a three-day Kaizen with a new combined program, in which the guidelines and priority points welcome new applicants and grantees, foster collaboration between the arts and other sectors, and encourage a powerful and engaging experience in the arts accessible to special populations, communities, and public audiences across the state.

Important updates included:

- Two grant amounts, \$2500 and \$5000

- New priority points to prioritize grantees who've been funded smaller grant amounts and experiences with primary mission and intent in the arts, humanities, and sciences
- No subjective review, just checking eligibility and priority points
- Integrating school applicants, which means moving school grant approvals to a more school-year friendly timeline

Youth Arts Impact Network (YAIN). Mass Cultural Council and EdVestors staff have continued to foster our important partnership in the [Youth Arts Impact Network](#). Quarterly YAIN convenings included both in-person and virtual meetings and ranged from topics of evaluation, data collection, and impact, the role of CYD organizations in mental health, and the importance of networking. Organizations throughout the state continue to access the services of consultant Julia Gittleman, PhD for weekly office hours, covering topics including survey design, program planning, data analysis, and reporting and representing considerable geographic diversity. With a goal to revolutionize data management in Creative Youth Development (CYD) organizations, the YAIN collaboration also has helped to support [the 3C Data Alliance](#) as a collaborative structure that is organized by a Steering Committee, a National Advisory Group, and DreamYard, a Bronx-based CYD organization acting as the lead partner for the project. In FY25 we have supported the co-facilitation of the cohort of participating CYD organizations that serve as models for other cities. As we help young people involved in CYD organizations access and utilize their own data for storytelling, advocacy, employment, and enhanced leadership opportunities, this will positively impact organizations, the youth arts sector's collective impact, and overall advancement for arts and culture in our state.

CultureRx – Social Prescription. Since the publication of the [Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities](#), we have looked to expand and scale social prescribing in Massachusetts. This past summer, [Art Pharmacy and Mass Cultural Council officially announced](#) the launch of that statewide system in partnership with Mass General Brigham to bring this healthcare solution to the Commonwealth. In FY25 we have partnered with [Art Pharmacy](#) to have them continue their work with health plans/systems, community clinics, and other healthcare partners to enable healthcare providers to prescribe arts and culture to patients for both mental and physical health benefits. Their model is being adopted by third-party payers, which is an important element of scaling this kind of care. Prescriptions have been written to support doses of art and culture prescriptions in multiple regions. Through the dedicated support of Care Navigators they offer group, individual, receptive and active arts engagements that are in-person and virtual. In addition to assessing patient well-being, via the WHO-5 and the Loneliness scale, Art Pharmacy tracks uptake, adherence and patient satisfaction. They have worked to build and sustain relationships with arts and cultural partners, health practitioners, payers, funders, and insurance providers and have offered training modules for arts and cultural partners.

Poetry Out Loud. We have continued to contract with the Huntington Theatre Company to implement the national Poetry Out Loud program on behalf of Mass Cultural Council here in Massachusetts. POL is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation. The \$25,000 for the contract is designated for the program by the NEA in their grant to us. As one of the five largest programs in the country for the last twelve years and the largest in New England, Poetry Out Loud will continue to offer their semi-final and final rounds of the competition in March 2025.

Communities

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

The Community Initiative includes the Local Cultural Council (LCC) program, Cultural Districts and Creative Experiences

Local Cultural Councils. The Community team is working with all 329 cultural councils across the state to complete the FY25 Local Cultural Council grant cycle. The majority of councils have submitted their final reports and have received their FY25 Allocation. By the end of February, all councils should be completed with their grant cycle. The Local Cultural Council Program turns 45 this year. We are currently working with the Communications team to collect information from our LCC members about being an LCC member and what that means for them and their community and create a blog post with their input. Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Council (HPWTCC) is our first Tribal Cultural Council to complete the grant cycle and disseminate funds to their community. The tribe approved 8 applications for funding total of \$9470.

In addition, Communities team has held a number of webinars with the Mass Municipal Association as a way of re-introducing arts and culture to their communities. [Building Vibrant and Creative Communities](#), [The Power of Culture in Communities](#), and in the most recent webinar, [Advancing Community Arts, Culture, and Economic Development: Best Practices for Select Boards](#) we launched the [new rural resource page and toolkit](#) on the Mass Cultural Council website. Also, as part of our continued advancement work, on January 23-24 the Communities Team tabled at the Mass Municipal Conference "Connect 351", meeting with municipal officials, LCCs and other municipal stakeholders to talk about the importance of arts and culture in their communities. We launched a new training tool for the LCC members to offer enhanced training for the 329 Cultural Councils. The team worked with Dawn Heinen, our Digital Communications Manager, to create [a new training module](#) for LCC members. The members can take the training as a refresher or when they become members of the Council. This new module will be a game changer in terms of providing support for LCC members.

Cultural Districts Initiative (CDI). We have brought in 3 new districts under the old Cultural Districts program and have paused the program now until FY26. The Cultural Districts program is currently going through a re-design process, being led by Civic Moxie. In the past month the consultants have held focus groups, interviews with staff, conversations with current CD's as well as reviewed many documents. We have held 2 task force meetings with outside partners who are very engaged in the process. The redesign process will continue to the spring when we create new guidelines and procedures for the Cultural District Program.

FY25 CDI Grant. 57 Districts have received grants of 15K. We held a Cultural District Grants Celebration on Feb. 13 in Lowell to celebrate our latest Cultural District Investment Grants made to 57 state-designated Cultural Districts across the commonwealth.

Cultural Facilities Fund

Jay Paget, Miranda Cook

The CFF application deadline was December 14, and 193 organizations submitted applications. Staff will work with our colleagues at MassDevelopment and reviewers to assess applications over the next few months.

Here is a summary of the applications:

- 154 Capital applications
- 30 Feasibility applications
- 9 Systems Replacement Plan applications

193 Total apps being reviewed

Total development cost of all applications

\$473,897,281 - Capital (CAP)

\$26,352,794 - Feasibility and Technical Assistance (FTA)

\$160,000 - Systems Replacement Plan (SRP)

Submitted the [CFF Annual Report](#): Here is a summary of the economic impact results

149 Cultural Facilities Fund grantees reported:

- 1,200 full-time jobs and \$109 million in wages and salaries at organizations in the current round of funding.

- 38,506 architects, engineers, contractors, and construction workers employed on Cultural Facilities Fund projects over all rounds of funding.
- 3,344 new permanent jobs projected in Massachusetts as a result of Cultural Facilities Fund projects over all rounds of funding.
- 281 cultural organizations reported plans to proceed with \$1.3 billion in capital projects over the next three years.

Organizations

Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee

Cultural Investment Portfolio/Organizations. The Operating Grants for Organizations launched in March, 2024, with the application deadline in June, 2024. We received 480 eligible applications, out of a total of 581 received. Grants were awarded to 155 organizations, and organizations were informed of the grant decisions in early November. Organizations staff were available for discussions with declined applicants, and from November – January, we met one-on-one with over 70 organizations to give them detailed feedback on their applications.

We have reviewed the feedback that we received on the first cycle of the Operating Grants program, which informed edits we made to the application for the second cycle of this grant program, which launched on February 18 with the deadline on April 17. There will be an online information session on February 25.

Festivals & Projects program/Creative Experiences. The final list of Festivals & Projects grantees was confirmed following the decisions on Operating Grants, and grantees were notified. The new team (Festivals & Projects, combined with Creative Projects in Schools) spent three days in an intensive process to develop the guidelines for the new Creative Experiences program which will launch in March, 2025.

Gaming Mitigation. The FY25 cycle of the Gaming Mitigation program closed on January 9, 2025. Program Officer Lillian Lee implemented changes to the program that streamlined the application process and improved the accuracy of the applications. The updates made to the program and outreach efforts resulted in a significant number of new applicants to the program.

Card to Culture. The Card to Culture program re-opened for new enrollments in November, and annual reports were due at the end of January. Program Officer Lindiana Flores has met with various agencies to develop awareness of the program, including the Department of Developmental Services, and Mass Housing.

Gaming Mitigation Fund (Agenda Item 9(d)(i))

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Lillian Lee, Sara Glidden, Jen Lawless
 Date: February 26, 2025
 Re: FY25 Gaming Mitigation Program

Background:

The Gaming Mitigation Fund provides grants to Massachusetts nonprofit and municipal performing arts centers to spend on touring shows or touring artist fees. Established by statute, these grants aim to target funding to those most directly impacted by the operation of resort-style casinos. Funding decisions are determined by a formula based on the percentage of performances that include an eligible touring entity, and the amount of fees paid to those eligible entities.

FY25 Program Summary:

The FY25 cycle of the Gaming Mitigation program closed on January 9, 2025. There were 61 total applications for the FY25 cycle. The updates made to the program and outreach efforts did result in a significant number of new applicants to the program:

- 34% (21) were new to the Gaming Mitigation Fund
 - 12 as a result of direct outreach to organizations who did not receive Operating Grants for Organizations
- 1. 8% (5) identified as BIPOC-Centered Organizations
- 13% (8) are UP-Designated Organizations

There was an intentional lower rate of retention this year compared to previous years given the change to the guidelines that prohibit organizations from receiving both Operating Support funding and Gaming Mitigation Funding. There was a retention rate of 69%, with 40 out of 58 organizations reapplying for the FY25 cycle. Of the 31% (18) organizations that did not reapply, 78% (14) chose to accept Operating Support Funds instead and were therefore no longer eligible for the program.

Reflections on Changes to FY25 Program:

For the FY25 Gaming Mitigation Fund, we 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.

The changes made to the application did move us toward those goals. We were able to capture a broader range of touring entities. This allowed organizations with less traditional presenting models to more effectively apply for the program. The changes also led to fewer revisions needed by applicants,

with a 29% decrease in applications needing revisions, which led to a faster and more efficient review process for staff.

For this cycle, we have changed the program from a 1-year to a 2-year grant cycle, which means that all FY25 grantees will also receive a grant in FY26 and the next open application for this program will be for FY27 funding. With an additional year before the next application cycle, we hope to continue to measure the impact of the changes made and develop an outreach plan that focuses on reaching new organizations.

A recommended funding list is provided in Appendix A.

Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations (Agenda Item 9(d)(ii))

To: Mass Cultural Council Grants Committee
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee
Dt: February 12, 2025
Re: Organizations grants: Operating Grants for Organizations and Cultural Investment Portfolio

Updated Funding Recommendations

The Organizations team presented funding recommendations at the November meeting of the Programs Committee. The list included a waitlist of organizations that were next in line to be funded, pending the outcome of applications to the Gaming Mitigation grant program. Organizations that applied to the Gaming Mitigation and were also awarded a grant from the Portfolio or Operating Grants for Organizations program are only allowed to receive one of the grants and were required to choose which grant they prefer to accept.

February 11 was the deadline for organizations to inform us of their decision whether to accept the grant from the Gaming Mitigation program, which would make funds available to the next organizations on the list. You can see the list of grantees that were previously approved in November who chose to decline their operating support grant in Appendix B. We recommend to reallocating these funds to additional organizations to reach the maximum number of otherwise unfunded applications and are recommending 3 additional organizations for a grant from the Operating Grants for Organizations program.

There was one organization that was not approved for CIP funding in November because we expected that they would select the larger Gaming Mitigation fund grant over their CIP Portfolio grant. However, they chose not to apply to Gaming Mitigation in FY25. So, they will receive their CIP Portfolio Grant instead.

Finally, there were two organizations that should have been included on the CIP Portfolio grantee list, which were inadvertently omitted.

The six recommended grantees can be found in Appendix B

The six organizations that are recommended for funding now, along with the grantees approved in November brings the total number of CIP Portfolio and Operating Grants for Organizations to 393 totaling \$7,201,700.

Grants for Creative Individuals (Agenda Item 9(d)(iii))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
 Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jenifer Lawless, Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Summer Confuorto, Deborah Kenyon
 Dt: February 26, 2025
 Re: FY25 Grants for Creative Individuals

Summary. The Artist Team is pleased to submit for approval our Agency's recommendations for the FY25 Grants for Creative Individuals. The grants are unrestricted awards of \$5,000 to applicants who demonstrate achievement of creative expression and commitment to their artistic/cultural practice.

The program launched in FY24 after a redesign as part of the Agency's Racial Equity Plan.

Pending approval by the full council we will hold a grant celebration at the Great Hall in the Massachusetts State House on Monday, May 19, 2025. Council Members encouraged to attend, details to come

Eligibility

- o Applications were open to Massachusetts artists/culture bearers/creative practitioners in ALL artistic/creative disciplines
- o Ineligible:
 - Undergrad students or grad students in the arts
 - Recent (past three years) recipients of direct Mass Cultural Council grants
 - Non-MA residents

FY25 Stats

- o 3,084 eligible applications
- o 447 recommended grants (14.5% of applications, an increase of approximately 5% from FY24)
- o Please note: Programs Committee reviewed and approved a list of 435 recommended grantees. Since then, unspent funds from other programs became available, totaling 12 additional grants. Today's recommendations include all 447 recommended FY25 Grants for Creative Individuals awards

Funding Priorities

- o Funding Priority (modest ratings advantage) for "Underfunded" applicants, including those who identify as:
 - BIPOC
 - Having a Disability
 - Recipients of anti-poverty benefits
 - Veterans of the United States Armed Forces
- o Recipients with no direct grant past 6 yrs

- o Traditional/Folk Artists/Culture Bearers

Review Process

- o Geographic Distribution (same % of grants as % applications in each County, see "Grants by County" chart below)
- o Funding Priorities (as listed above)
- o Scores by reviewers from Massachusetts creative/cultural sector based on how the applicants demonstrate achievement of creative expression and commitment to their artistic/cultural practice

Grant Statistics. In keeping with the Agency's Racial Equity Plan and D/deaf and Disability Equity Plan, we present relevant data points in reaching equity goals:

Grants By County

County	#Apps	%Apps	#Grants
Barnstable	99	3%	15
Berkshire	113	4%	17
Bristol	153	5%	22
Dukes	26	1%	4
Essex	256	8%	37
Franklin	131	4%	17
Hampden	169	5%	24
Hampshire	250	8%	37
Middlesex	729	24%	104
Nantucket	2	0%	1
Norfolk	208	7%	30
Plymouth	95	3%	14
Suffolk	643	21%	95
Worcester	210	7%	30
	3084	100%	447

New Applicants/New Grantees

- 1,741 applicants (56%) applied to the agency for the first time
- 435 grantees (97%) are getting their first Mass Cultural Council grant

Funding Priority Totals/Percentages for All Eligible Applications (3084)

No recent grant	BIPOC	Disability	Veteran	Poverty	Traditional
2906	1160	590	60	598	82
94.23%	37.61%	19.13%	1.95%	19.39%	2.66%

Funding Priority Totals/Percentages for Recommended Grantees (447)

No recent grant	BIPOC	Disability	Veteran	Poverty	Traditional
443	284	154	24	188	66
99.11%	63.53%	34.45%	5.37%	42.06%	14.77%

In Appendix C you will find a list of Recommended FY25 Grants for Creative Individuals recipients and in Appendix D a list of FY25 Reviewers for the Grants for Creative Individuals program.

Massachusetts Poet Laureate (Agenda Item 9(d)(iv))

To: Mass Cultural Council

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jenifer Lawless, Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Bethann Steiner, Dan Blask

Dt: February 26, 2025

Re: Massachusetts Poet Laureate Program and Grant

Summary. In February 2025, Governor Maura T. Healey announced [Executive Order no. 640](#), establishing the position of Poet Laureate in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The order specified that Mass Cultural Council administer the position's application process.

We propose that our Agency provide a grant in the amount of \$15,000 to the selected poet for the first year, to acknowledge the unique significance of the Poet Laureate position. We would anticipate working toward finding other funding sources for such financial support in future years.

Program Overview:

- o Statewide Honorary Position

- o After an application process, the Governor selects and appoints a poet for a two-year term (with a possible two-year extension).

- o Duties:
 - o Encouraging poetry appreciation and creative expression,
 - o Public events, readings, creating occasion-specific poems and
 - o Advising state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on poetry in schools

- o Applicants need to be a Massachusetts resident (three-year minimum) who:
 - o Possess a substantial body of work, and
 - o Demonstrate commitment to promoting an awareness of poetry and literary excellence

- o Open application process through Mass Cultural Council's grant system (with the goal of launching March 18, 2025 and deadline for applications in early April 2025)

- o Council staff conducts "round one" review and refers a smaller pool to the Nominating Committee appointed by Governor per the terms of the Executive Order (April/May)

- o Nominating Committee members select two finalists for Governor (May)
- o Governor announces appointment of Poet Laureate (the goal being May 30, 2025 at Mass Poetry Festival)

Grants. In future years, we will seek other sources of funding, including possibly a separate state appropriation, for the Massachusetts Poet Laureate honorarium. But due to the accelerated timeline for launching the program this Winter/Spring, we recommend providing the Poet Laureate for the first year of the term with a \$15,000 grant by employing funds from grants that were previously approved by the Council but were returned or otherwise cancelled and any other funds contributed by other partners such as Mass Humanities and, to the extent such funds are insufficient, from our general appropriation.

Conclusion. We look forward to sharing news about the program in weeks ahead and appreciate the Council's help in raising awareness of the of the application, once launched.