



*Power of culture*

**UNOFFICIAL DRAFT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE AT ITS NEXT MEETING**

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-FIFTY FOURTH MEETING  
OF  
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2022**

**ONLINE MEETING**

**Council Members Present** were

Nina Fialkow, Chair  
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair  
Che Anderson  
Barbara Schaffer Bacon  
Karen Barry  
Kathleen Castro  
Simone Early  
Matthew Keator  
Ann Murphy  
Allyce Najimy  
Troy Siebels

**Also Present** were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Sara Glidden, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee, Jay Paget, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, and Greg Torrales; and musician Precious Perez.

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 10:04am and asked Deputy 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 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.

**Prepared on 4/25/22**

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.

Executive Director Michael Bobbitt then introduced Greg Torrales, the newest member of the Mass Cultural Council staff who joined the Cultural Investment Portfolio team earlier in March. Greg briefly introduced himself to the Council.

Michael then reminded Council Members that there would be a Mission Moment at the beginning of all Council Meetings to spotlight a Massachusetts artist. Today, musician Precious Perez joined the Council to perform her song *Campeona*. Michael introduced Precious and she performed – vocals and ukulele. After her performance, Michael asked Precious if she would tell Council Members more about the piece. She explained that the song talks about the fact that she sometimes feels the world is on her shoulders, but she doesn't talk about because she needs to be there for other people. She knows that "even the strongest tree can fall" and that she is never alone because her loved ones are also always there for her; she is a champion, and we are all champions.

Michael thanked Precious, then took a moment to introduce Lillian Lee, another new member of the Agency's staff who joined the Cultural Investment Portfolio

team last month.

Nina then asked Council Members if they'd had a chance to review the Minutes from their last meeting on January 27<sup>th</sup> and, if so, she would look for a motion to approve them. Karen Barry moved to approve the minutes, and Barbara Schaffer Bacon seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Jo-Ann Davis, Cecil Barron Jensen, Karen Hurvitz, and Lillian Do were absent it was

RESOLVED: that the Council approves the minutes of the January 27, 2022 Council Meeting in the form presented to the Council.

Nina then gave her Chair's report stating that the Strategic Plan Task Force has been established and will have its first meeting on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Matthew Keator, Ann Murphy, Cecil Barron Jensen, and Kathy Castro have agreed to serve. Nina noted that when she and Vice Chair Marc Carroll established the Task Force, they considered which Council Members had recently served on other task forces so that as many voices as possible could be heard from. Nina noted that the Agency is required to undergo a strategic planning process by the National Endowment for the Arts. She then asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael hopes Council members are enjoying his monthly memos and finding them informative. He noted that today Council Members would hear updates on FY23 advocacy efforts, the Agency's racial equity plan, plans for COVID relief grant programs, and a summary of proposed changes to the Agency's Cultural Investment Portfolio grant program. Staff is in the early stages of planning for next fiscal year and a draft of the RFP for the strategic planning consultant will be sent to the Task Force soon.

Nina then asked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for her Advocacy update.

Bethann let Council Members know that budget advocacy meetings were taking place now. The Agency started in a strong position with the Governor's budget in January which included a slight increase to Mass Cultural Council's line item. Bethann reported that Michael had testified before the Joint Committee on Ways & Means last month and proposed an increase to \$27.4M. This represents an ambitious goal, but the Agency's advocacy partners are firm in their encouragement and Michael is meeting with House members to build support – there are 43 meetings on the calendar and so far, staff has received no negative feedback. Nina had asked Bethann to remind Council Members of the calendar for the budget process which Bethann summarized as follows: The House Ways & Means Chair will meet with all members to talk about priorities in March. The House Ways & Means Committee will most likely release their budget sometime during the week of April 11<sup>th</sup>. If an amendment is needed, staff will work with partners and Chair Carole Fiola to gather support and secure co-

sponsors. The House will likely spend the week of April 25<sup>th</sup> debating and reading through amendments. This is a key point where Council Members can place calls to their state representatives and ask for their support of this important investment in the cultural sector. Bethann is happy to provide Council Members with talking points. The Senate will follow in May with their budget, most likely the week of May 9<sup>th</sup>. Amendments will be due that week, then there will be a week for the Senate to go through the amendments, there will be a debate the week before Memorial Day, followed by Conference Committee. The new fiscal year begins on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Bethann then gave Council Members a quick policy update on our bill to expand Local Cultural Council eligibility so that certain municipal elected officials can serve on their local cultural council. This bill has been steadily moving through the process, has been processed by the House clerk, and is with the House Steering & Policy Committee Chaired by Kevin Honan. The Committee feels this is a positive piece of policy. Bethann concluded her update by asking for Council Members' assistance in amplifying the Agency's new COVID-19 impact survey for artists and organizations which will remain open until April 15<sup>th</sup>.

Nina thanked Bethann and echoed her request for Council Members to reach out to their legislators. She then asked Michael and People & Culture Director Catherine Cheng-Anderson for their Cultural Equity & Access Report.

Equity & Inclusion Program Officer Cheyenne Cohn-Postell shared a PowerPoint presentation, and a copy of that presentation is available upon request. Michael began by sharing some of the ongoing work the staff is undertaking including promoting and upgrading translation and interpretation services. A recent information session for the AAPI Arts & Culture Program was available in Cantonese. Requests for translation and interpretation services are being collected via a Google form. Staff is working to re-prioritize action steps from the racial equity plan and update timelines, and to amplify BIPOC work. This is reflected in the content on the Agency's Instagram page. Michael then asked Cheyenne to play a new video teaser introducing the Agency that Communications & Community Engagement Manager Carmen Plazas had worked to create. Cheyenne then let Council Members know that she is currently meeting with all program staff to review programs with an equitable grantmaking lens. Anti-racist learning conversations have also been added to the agenda at each bi-weekly All-Staff meeting. Cheyenne is continuing to take suggestions from staff as to the topics for each of these conversations.

Catherine then gave Council Members an update on some of the ongoing internal equity and access work:

Staff has deployed an online acknowledgement receipt of the Agency's Racial Equity Plan. The purpose of a signed acknowledgment is to demonstrate that the person not only has received the plan but also is responsible for knowing the information contained within the plan and has a point of contact if they have

questions. To date we have received confirmation from each contractor and consultant working for Mass Cultural Council and will continue to deploy the acknowledgement as we onboard additional staff. Next, in partnership with the Public Affairs team, Catherine has developed the first-ever Mass Cultural Council Careers page as a tool to recruit, hire, and promote diverse talent. The page is laid out beautifully, and Catherine thanked the Public Affairs team for their hard work developing it. The content on the page reaffirms the Agency's commitment to access and equity. The goal of the page is to ensure candidates have a point of contact for any requests or needs regarding accessibility, accommodations, modifications, or specific preferences we should be aware of during the hiring process.

In February, Catherine implemented an additional step in the Agency's standardized hiring practices. She has incorporated an "Interview Outline" intended to inform candidates on the topics they should expect to speak about when interviewing with Mass Cultural Council. The additional step is intended to increase access, transparency, fairness and ensure an equitable candidate experience. Catherine believes being candid about our interview process helps to foster more meaningful discussions and it helps the candidate understand what skillsets and values they'll need to succeed in the role they are applying for.

Over the next few months, Catherine will be working on updating the Employee Handbook to ensure the language included therein is inclusive. Also, she plans to update the Agency's policies and introduce policies to bring Mass Cultural Council into alignment with other state agencies. She is developing an online internal complaint form for employees and contractors to file a complaint of Racism, Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault/Stalking, Workplace Violence or Retaliation. Currently this complaint form and process exists only for Executive branch employees. So, while this is a goal of the racial equity plan this will also bring our agency in alignment with the Commonwealth. Additionally, over the next couple of months she will be busy working with teams as the Agency is actively hiring and recruiting several open positions. She will continue to lead hiring teams through best practices regarding diversity, access, and inclusion and ensure our standard hiring processes is being followed to ensure equitable hiring process and candidate experience. That concluded the progress report. Catherine noted that she is proud of the work of the Agency's teams. She then asked if Council Members had any questions or comments.

Karen Barry complimented Catherine for the work she has done. Karen likes what Catherine has built in terms of people having access to a safe space to have a conversation or ask a question. She sees a lot of thoughtfulness in the work.

There were no further comments, so Nina asked David for his Financial Report.

David stated that the Agency is eight months into the fiscal year and is at or below the projected target in most accounts. There is always some catch-up in the final quarter of the year given how the Agency operates and processes contracts. David has been working closely with Tom Luongo, the Agency's Fiscal Information and Compliance Officer, to reclassify some expenses, Council Members may note some differences in the report included in their meeting materials as items are being moved into the correct sub-account. David noted that Council Members may have seen the annual report to the legislature on Gaming revenues which have been robust. Last year the Agency received \$3.1M, this year the Agency has already received \$3.5M. It has been three months since the exit interview with the state auditor. Staff was promised a report by late January but are still receiving questions and hoping to have a report soon.

There were no questions for David, so Nina moved to the next item on the agenda: a discussion regarding state pandemic relief funds.

Michael began by summarizing the public input process. The Agency held a virtual public input forum in January and took written comments – receiving more than 350 responses. Staff analyzed this input and is proposing establishing two unrestricted Covid relief grant programs: one for organizations and one for individuals. Several members of the staff have formed a task force charged with developing draft guidelines and parameters for the programs. This will eventually be part of the FY23 spending plan. The Agency has received a request from Mass Humanities; possibly they could help the Agency in dispersing funds. Michael then asked Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) Program Director Jay Paget to explain a proposed contribution of pandemic relief funds to the 2022 CFF funding round.

Jay began with a brief CFF overview. The fund was established in and this is the 14<sup>th</sup> round of funding. CFF grants are for planning and implementation of repairs, renovations, construction, HVAC, plumbing – anything to do with fixed assets. About 150 applications are received per year and approximately 90 receive funding. To date, 1,162 grants totaling \$138M have been made over 13 rounds. Of the projects that receive funding, 30% are from community arts centers, 30% are from museums, 20% are within performing arts centers, and 20% are historic home and sites and science and environmental centers. Staff works to ensure funds are distributed equitably. Per the CFF statute, CFF grants are required to be matched 1:1 and every award must be certified as having achieved its match before being funded. Jay reported that every grant given before 2019 has been so certified and met its match requirement. Seventy percent (70%) of the awards approved since 2020 have met their match requirement and the rest are expected to do so in time. Jay noted that over the 13 rounds (covering roughly 13 years), CFF has helped to employ 13,000 architects, engineers, and contractors. Staff is currently wrapping up the 14<sup>th</sup> round of funding and has \$8 million in "regular" CFF funds (i.e., made available by the Governor in the Commonwealth's annual capital plan) to disperse. Staff is today seeking

approval from the Council to apply an additional \$7.1M in "Pandemic Relief Funds" to this CFF round which will enable all eligible projects to receive funding in this round. Typically, about 60% of eligible applicants are able to be funded in a CFF Round and these additional funds will raise to 100%, a unique opportunity for the Agency and the program.

Michael reminded members that CFF funds come from a capital bond bill and staff works in partnership with MassDevelopment to manage the program.

David provided some legal context: Massachusetts passed the COVID-19 Impact Act (Chapter 102 of 2021) last year and therein allocated \$60.1M in "Pandemic Relief Funds" to Mass Cultural Council. Under the act, it is expressly permissible for Mass Cultural Council to contribute some of these funds to CFF. David further noted that per the CFF statute, CFF grants are not approved by the Council but rather by a separate Advisory Committee existing under the statute and MassDevelopment, so that the Council's involvement in CFF would be the vote to contribute funds to the program (not as noted, the approval of the specific CFF grants).

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked if fully funding all applications will be in alignment and support Mass Cultural Council's equity goals. Michael said yes as it would fund all applicants and further explained that last year in partnership with MassDevelopment a new rule was created: once an organization receives funding it then needs to wait one year before applying again thus also freeing up funds for more applicants. Jen added that if organizations accept a CFF grant funded from Pandemic Relief Funds, it will impact their eligibility for future Pandemic Relief Fund grant programs administered by the Agency.

Barbara asked how this might impact smaller communities and organizations. Michael explained they would be eligible to apply for CFF in the fall, they just would only be able to access Pandemic Relief Funds through one program (either the portion of CFF funded through Pandemic Relief Funds or a future Agency program). David clarified that if the Council approves this contribution to CFF, applicants who otherwise would not have received CFF awards will now receive awards and such applicants will only be receiving a CFF grant funding because of these contributed Pandemic Relief Funds.

Karen Barry noted that when people are considering applying for CFF it sometimes can take them a year of preparation given the matching requirement and other requirements. The application is a good deal of work. Is she correct in assuming this?

Jay acknowledged that the application is a good deal of work but clarified that applicants do not need to have 100% of the matching funds in hand when they apply. For example, if an applicant has a \$100K project, they need to have \$50K of matching funds in-hand when they apply. Jay added that sometimes the application is more complicated if the project itself is more complicated. He

also noted that the program offers SRP grants that enable organizations to get a 20-year capital needs assessment.

Michael suggested that perhaps Cheyenne could work with Jay and CFF Program Officer Miranda Cook on simplifying the application. He also asked if the match was part of the law and David confirmed that it is specifically required under the CFF statute.

Nina thanked Jay for his presentation and noted that he had been managing CFF since it began in 2007. She then asked David to read the proposal that staff is recommending the Council approve the contribution of \$7.16 million of State Pandemic Relief Funds to the current CFF round. Troy Siebels moved to approve the recommendation, and Karen Barry seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Jo-Ann, Cecil, Karen Hurvitz, and Lillian Do were absent it was

RESOLVED: that the Council approve the contribution of \$7.16 million of so-called "State Pandemic Relief Funds" made available under Massachusetts Immediate COVID Recovery Needs Act (Chapter 102 of the Acts of 2021, Section 2, Line item 1599-20430 to the current round of funding under Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund program (Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 23G, Secs 42-43).

Nina then asked Vice Chair Marc Carroll to lead the final item for discussion on the agenda as Grants Committee Chair Jo-Ann Davis was ill and unable to attend the meeting.

Marc let Council Members know that the Grants Committee had met last week to discuss changes to the Agency's Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP). CIP is an operating support program and the largest annual program in terms of dollars. Staff has done a great job looking at ways to improve the program to make it more inclusive and provided the Grants Committee with an in-depth briefing summarizing the changes. The Committee had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the changes with staff. There was no need for a vote then and there won't be a vote today as any new program will come before the Council for approval as part of the FY23 spending plan. The Grants Committee was impressed with the presentation and supportive of the direction staff shared. Marc asked if any Committee Members would like to comment. Barbara confirmed she felt the staff had done great work and that the program is headed in the right direction and addressing past harms. Marc stated that the Committee felt the full Council should hear about the changes and invited Program Manager Sara Glidden to give her presentation.

A copy of Sara's presentation is available upon request. Sara outlined the current state of the program and the CIP team's approach to program redesign – maintaining values, centering equity, and considering staff capacity – along with the goals of the redesign and the process the team used. She then outlined the concerns with the current iteration of the program and provided a timeline



and summary of the major proposed changes: the Portfolio will become a 5-year grant program; the Gateway program will be discontinued; grant amounts are formula-based; Equity Impact points are incorporated into the formula which will increase grant amounts for BIPOC, Gateway City, and under-resourced rural communities; and grant amounts will be finalized with the FY23 spending plan. Sara concluded by letting Council Members know they would find a document identifying where all organizations are in the CIP process within their meeting materials.

Kathleen Castro asked Sara to clarify how many organizations currently in the Gateway program was staff proposing be brought into the Portfolio now – was it all of them or just the nine organizations that have had two successful years in the Gateway program? Sara responded that it would be just the nine organizations who have already had two successful years in Gateway. Kathleen asked how much funding those nine organizations would receive and Jen clarified this would be part of the FY23 spending plan the Council would see in August.

Michael noted that it is important for the Agency to be conscious of the fact that an increase in funding each year can make room for new organizations to join the Portfolio and Kathleen agreed it is important to be judicious as funding grows.

There were no further questions. Nina thanked Sara and commended her and the CIP team for their hard work and great ideas.

Michael reminded Council Members that a full list of meeting dates was included on page 22 of their materials and that they'd receive calendar invitations soon and David reminded everyone that the May Council Meeting would be on a Monday.

Nina noted that she wanted to recognize members of the staff who would serve on the Strategic Plan Task Force: Erik Holmgren, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, and Lisa Simmons. She then thanked her fellow Council Members for their time and thanked Agency staff for their hard work and for keeping the Council informed. That concluded the agenda and Nina as Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:29am.