

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2022

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Jo-Ann Davis, Chair of the Grants Committee
Nina Fialkow, Council Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Council Chair
Che Anderson
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Kathleen Castro
Karen Hurvitz

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director
Sara Glidden, Cultural Investment Portfolio Program Manager
Kalyn King, Cultural Investment Portfolio Program Officer
Lillian Lee, Cultural Investment Portfolio Program Officer
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Special Assistant to the Executive Director & Leadership Team
Carmen Plazas, Communications Manager

Chair Jo-Ann Davis called the meeting to order at 10:02am 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).

Prepared on 4/12/22

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.

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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.

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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.

Jo-Ann then asked Committee Members to approve the minutes of their last business meeting held on January 13, 2022. Barbara Schaffer Bacon moved to approve the minutes and Karen Barry seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Che Anderson and Cecil Barron Jensen were absent all were in favor, and it was

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee approves the minutes of the January 13, 2022 Grants Committee Meeting in the form presented to the Grants Committee at its March 15, 2022 Meeting.

Jo-Ann did not have anything to report to the Committee and asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his report.

Michael let Committee Members know the Agency is halfway through the process of facilitating FY22 grant programs. Once the process is complete Committee Members will receive a year-end report. Michael then took a moment to introduce Lillian Lee, the newest member of the Agency's Cultural Investment Portfolio team who joined the staff in early March. Staff is continuing to discuss plans for the Agency's Pandemic Relief funds allocation and is looking forward to sharing more about that and the revisions to the Cultural Investment Portfolio program later in the meeting.

Jo-Ann then asked Operations Director Jen Lawless and Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for an update on the Agency's Pandemic Relief funds plans.

Jen let Committee Members know the Agency had collected both written comments from the public and held a virtual public input on January 24th to learn what the sector needs most in terms of post-pandemic recovery support. Since then, there have been two all-staff discussions and the general idea is to design unrestricted support programs for individuals and organizations. The next step is to convene a smaller working group of cross Agency staff to design the programs. The goal is to have draft guidelines ready for the May Council Meeting. There are a lot of details, but staff has learned from previous relief programs and will take what they learned last time and improve upon them while making sure the new programs reflect the Agency's racial equity goals. Bethann added that in addition to getting a full proposal to the Council in May, staff has an ambitious goal of making all the grants in the coming fiscal year (FY2023). Under the statute the funds are good for several years, but Bethann has received input from legislators who are anxious to see the funds awarded as soon as possible.

Jo-Ann stated that she found the feedback at the public input forum very valuable and is glad to hear staff plans to keep the application simple.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked two questions: first, if staff might consider investing in capacity building grants in the digital space and two, if they imagine the funds all coming through Mass Cultural Council or if the Agency might work with intermediaries to get funds into pockets around the state.

Michael responded that staff has had some significant conversations around capacity building grants for upgrades and would like to make grants of this nature into this a regular, annual program potentially for FY24. Staff is also having conversations around getting some help distributing the Pandemic Relief funds grants as doing so will free staff up to focus on recruiting and get funds to individuals and organizations who have not been funded before.

Barbara asked if the new capacity building grant program would be funded by the Agency's regular allocation. Does Michael see using any of the Pandemic Relief funds for this? Michael responded that because Pandemic Relief funds are going to be unrestricted staff didn't think a capacity building grant program was necessary right now.

Barbara asked if staff was thinking only about direct to individuals and direct to organizations as opposed to collaborators or groups that support those organizations and individuals such regional foundations; or if there was any thought to doing something bigger around arts education or other specific areas. Michael explained that regional foundations were welcome to apply but staff wasn't considering a formal collaboration and that perhaps this is something that can be part of the upcoming strategic plan conversation. Right now, staff is working to get the funds out fast. Jen added that spending the Pandemic Relief funds allocation quickly will position the Agency to request additional Pandemic Relief funds when they are available.

Dave reported that as is included in the Council Meeting book, staff will be suggesting (as it says in the statute) that Pandemic Relief funds are contributed to the upcoming round of Cultural Facilities Fund grants. Staff has also received a request proposal from Mass Humanities for Pandemic Relief funds.

Barbara asked how long groups will have to spend the funds. Jen explained that staff is still determining this but typically, because these are state contracts, grantees need to spend the funds within a fiscal year; grantees will at least have all of FY23.

Che Anderson joined the meeting.

Jo-Ann moved to the next item on the agenda: a presentation regarding revisions to the Agency's Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP) program. The Committee is reviewing these revisions before they are presented to the full Council at its Meeting on March 22.

CIP Program Manager Sara Glidden delivered this presentation and a copy of it 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 Committee Members with 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 historically underfunded applicants such as BIPOC, Gateway City, and under-resourced rural communities; and grant amounts will

be finalized with the FY23 spending plan. Jo-Ann thanked Sara for her presentation and congratulated her and the CIP team for their terrific work in taking a fresh look at the program, she then opened the meeting to questions and comments from Committee Members.

Karen Barry thanked Sara and the team for the tremendous amount of work they did and noted that these changes are monumental. Karen asked if staff would look at need-based criteria when considering Equity Impact points. Sara explained that need is very hard to measure and changes year to year, but staff has been thinking hard about it and trying to take a philosophical approach.

Karen then asked if there was any thought being given to asking legacy organizations who have received funding for the last 11 years to sit a round of funding out and make room for a broader group of new grantees. Sara explained that the dependability and predictability of the funding makes this a challenge. If staff were to tell 313 organizations that they needed to pause for one year, the next year they would all come back and apply, and this would create a staff capacity issue among other issues. Assigning current grantees to a five-year cycle was determined to be a better approach as organizations who are new to Mass Cultural Council will get a bump, so a new organization is advantaged over a returning one.

Michael added that the new formula allows staff to move the numbers around. If we are capped at a certain amount, we can make sure the money is shared. Ideally, every organization in the state is in the Portfolio. We can put more money into CIP, or we can have a larger conversation around restricting the number of grants an organization can apply for.

Jo-Ann reiterated that she loved the fresh look the team took at the program and applauds the five-year cycle and the elimination of Gateway and asked how staff would check in with organizations during their five-year funding period. Sara explained that staff would continue to require annual reporting and has some flexibility in adding questions to that, but they haven't fully defined exactly how they will check in with organizations. They want to find a balance between being a burden and being communicative and supportive.

Barbara expressed that she doesn't believe any group should assume entitlement and she is thrilled staff has taken this on and devised a solution. Barbara asked if she is a grantee in year four of funding, when would she be eligible to apply again. Sara explained this would be possible in FY24. Barbara asked what performance elements would be considered in reviewing applications acknowledging that looking at "excellence" is amorphous. Sara explained that for the duration of the Gateway program, staff looked at public value – a term that can be applied across disciplines and across many different sized organizations. Sara thinks the next step is to take the concept of public value and turn it into criteria so that organizations can see themselves reflected

in it. Currently the team defines public value as service to Massachusetts communities, residents, and artists. Dave added that the National Endowment for the Arts still includes the word "excellence" in its guidelines and that Mass Cultural Council will be looking at the term "excellence" and redefining it to reflect the qualities Sara has described.

Karen Hurvitz asked what the difference is between excellence and public value. Sara explained that the historical concept of excellence has been thought of as aligned with traditional, Eurocentric high art forms and while this is one form of excellence it excludes organizations that demonstrate excellence by adding value to their communities. Michael added that a 20-year-old organization deserves funding just as much as an organization that has been around for three years; a well-established Vietnamese boat maker deserves funding just as much as a 23-year-old just learning to build boats. Karen expressed concern that the Agency might be saying that folk artists and burgeoning arts organizations can't be considered excellent by taking away the word "excellence."

Sara acknowledged Karen's concern and agreed this is absolutely a challenge. She explained that the term would not be taken away, the Agency would just broaden it's understanding of it. Michael added that the Agency will work to figure out a definition of the word that is most inclusive. Barbara stated that she thinks it's also true that there are some groups doing work that is important but, at this point, not doing it all that consistently. She gave the example of a children's service organization in Turners Falls that has never had consistent funding, though it has benefitted from YouthReach. Barbara sees this moment as an opportunity to see excellence in all areas. Michael agreed and added that the arts programs he was involved in as a child were not all that excellent, but here he is as Executive Director of a state arts agency.

Barbara asked if staff had talking points prepared for organizations who receive the news of the changes to CIP and have concerns and questions; we want to make sure current grantees know they are still included along with people who will finally see themselves as part of the program. Jo-Ann agreed this is important anytime a major change is made within the Agency. Michael explained that staff was prepared to spend a good deal of time on the phone and that they'd be offering office hours as well. Talking points would be developed in collaboration with the Public Affairs team. Sara clarified that there would be a two-year grace period and that no organization would be cut loose suddenly and reiterated that staff is working on creating criteria where every organization can see themselves reflected in the program.

Karen Barry let Committee Members know that in the past she'd done an analysis of CIP and believed that a great percentage of the funding was going to Suffolk County organizations. With the new language and equity points the

Agency can feel confident that funds are going to every corner of the Commonwealth. Karen sees these revisions to CIP as a major step forward.

Kathy Castro asked if Sara could provide a list indicating where organizations are in the five-year cycle and Sara explained that this has yet to be assigned.

Sara then thanked Kalyn King, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, and Michael Ibrahim for their work on revising the program.

Barbara asked how Sara is thinking about the five-year cycle in relation to the state budget allocation and Sara explained that staff has always let grantees know the subsequent years of grants are dependent on the Agency's allocation. Michael added that staff wants to avoid bringing more grantees and then having the numbers go down; something staff is thinking about regarding the strategic plan is limiting applicants from applying for so many grants.

Kathy asked Michael if he was planning to hire additional staff to work on the Pandemic Relief funds grant programs and Michael responded that the Agency would have to.

As the meeting was ending Karen Barry shared that she'd heard from her son earlier in the week who'd been to Carnegie Hall to hear Unsuk Chin's *Shards of Silence* performed. Chin mentioned that she was able to compose the piece thanks to a grant from the Mass Cultural Council.

That brought the Committee to the end of its agenda and Jo-Ann as Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:12am.