



Power of culture

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, MAY 11, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Victoria Marsh, Chair of the Grants Committee
Nina Fialkow, Council Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Council Chair
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Cecil Barron Jensen
Karen Barry
Kathleen Castro
Jo-Ann Davis
Karen Hurvitz

Staff Members and Guests Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director
Kelly Bennett, Program Officer
Dan Blask, Program Officer
Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Program Officer
Sara Glidden, Program Manager
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Public Engagement Manager
Patrick Forde, Legislative Aide to Massachusetts State Senator Nick Collins

Chair Victoria Marsh called the meeting to order at 10:04am. Deputy Director David Slatery reminded all present of the Open Meeting Law but dispensed with reading it aloud.

Prepared on 6/2/21

Victoria then asked Committee Members to approve the minutes of their last business meeting held on December 17, 2020. Chair Nina Fialkow moved to approve the minutes and Vice Chair Marc Carroll seconded the motion. Noting that Committee Member Kathleen Castro was not present for the vote it was by roll call vote unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee approves the minutes of the December 17, 2020 Grants Committee Meeting in the form presented to the Grants Committee at its May 11, 2021 Meeting.

For her Chair's report Victoria Marsh kept her remarks brief and stated that there was much to discuss at today's meeting with regards to grants and recommendations for the May 18th Council Meeting. She then asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his report.

Michael, too, kept his report brief as he spoke with Committee members the prior week. Today marks Michael's 100th day as Executive Director of the Mass Cultural Council and so he thought it appropriate to share his video message to the cultural sector with Committee Members as his update. Michael then shared [his video](#) and that concluded his report.

Victoria thanked Michael and then asked Program Officers Kelly Bennett and Dan Blask for their presentation of the recommended FY21 Artist Fellowship grant recipients.

Dan Blask began by noting that there would be a full visual presentation at the May 18th Council meeting. Dan then explained that Artist Fellowships are direct awards to Massachusetts artists. Currently, fellowship grants are \$15K and finalist grants are \$1500. Grant applications are anonymously judged except in the case of Traditional Arts. Awards are based solely on the artistic quality and creative ability demonstrated in the work submitted. The total awards our panelists are recommending is \$55K more than last fiscal year, that is because even though the original FY 20 budget was the same, we diverted some funds last spring to the FY20 Covid-19 Relief Fund for Individuals. Awards this year total \$652,500. This is, as far as we can tell, the highest amount ever recommended for Artist Fellowships. Dan added that typically these awards would be presented to the Committee in two segments – half in January and half in May. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic all 75 recommendations are being presented at once: 40 Fellows and 35 Finalists. This is also on top of 1.2M that the Agency awarded for Covid-19 relief March. Dan concluded his remarks and asked if Committee Members had any questions.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon noticed that both the recommended awardees and panelists were more diverse than in previous years and asked if that was strategic.

Dan responded that the team always tries to have a diverse range of panelists: diverse opinions and points of view; ethnic and geographic diversity and, this year, made a special effort to bring more BIPOC onto panels. All panels were held via Zoom. The team also used the panelist nomination form, which was extremely helpful and garnered a number of panelists who were new to the Agency.

There being no further questions, Victoria asked for a motion to approve the Artists Fellowship and Finalist grants for approval at the May 18th Council Meeting. Karen Barry moved to approve the recommendations and Jo-Ann Davis Seconded the motion. David called the roll and, noting that Kathleen Castro had now joined the meeting at this point, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the FY21 Artist Fellowship grant awards in the disciplines of Crafts, Dramatic Writing, Film & Video, Music Composition, Photography and Sculpture/Installation/New Genres as reviewed by the Grants Committee at its May 11, 2021 meeting.

Victoria then asked staff for their presentation on the Supplemental Economic Recovery Grant programs.

Michael summarized the proposal: in late April the Agency learned it would receive \$844,700 in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds from the National Endowment for the Arts to address Covid relief and recovery. The Agency has also accrued to date \$591,000 in Gaming Funds that, under the Gaming Law and guidelines authorized by the Council in April 2020, can be designated for "Organizational Support." Staff is proposing that these two funding streams be combined (although into two distinct and separate programs) and used to fund applicants who were not able to be funded when they applied to the Cultural Organization Economic Recovery Grant (COERG) Program which the Agency administered in partnership with the Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development in December 2020 from the state's allocation of federal CARES Act funds. Demand for that program was high only 43% of applicants were able to awarded grants. Staff proposes that the next 42 unfunded applications on the applicant list from December 2020 be awarded these new relief dollars under the two new programs being proposed. Michael then asked Operations Director Jen Lawless to walk the Committee through the funding criteria. Jen shared a document outlining the original criteria and the modified criteria under the new proposed programs as well as other relevant data, and that document is attached to these minutes for reference. Jen concluded by thanking Program Manager Sara Glidden and Information Systems Coordinator Scott Hufford for their work on this program.

Jo-Ann Davis thanked Jen for her explanation around the criteria noting that it was especially helpful to see geographic data. Karen Barry agreed and commented that she was in favor of the approach overall. She is pleased to see grantees returning to the Agency and to see new people applying.

Michael added for next year, as part of the recruiting work he plans to do with Agency staff underfunding in rural areas and to BIPOC groups will be addressed and perhaps there will be funding earmarked for communication to AAPI groups.

Karen Barry asked if community theaters qualify under the Agency's gaming mitigation guidelines (the other program mandated under the Gaming Law) clarifying that she means community-based theater companies providing local programming.

Jen responded that touring is a key component for the Gaming Mitigation Program, but that there are other doorways for community theaters.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon commented that she is in support of the approach staff is proposing for the supplemental economic recovery grants, but would like the word "unsuccessful" to not be used in describing the 42 applicants who would receive funding as they were not unsuccessful, the Agency simply didn't have enough funding to meet the demand. David Slatery stated that staff could remove that word and simply describe them as having not received funding.

Barbara then asked if there was any discussion about reserving funds and being more proactive about recruitment of potential applicants who did not know they could apply. Does staff expect new monies in the coming year that could help them be proactive?

Michael responded that one misnomer about opening grants processes to underserved communities is that if you build it, they will just come, you have to recruit. When the Agency is doing its race equity planning, staff will discuss how they might reserve funds for those who don't know about the Agency's programs; noticing that grant deadlines make this approach somewhat challenging. Michael plans to have a conversation with staff next month focused on recruitment efforts.

Jo-Ann asked if the Agency's new grants management system was able to track applicants who routinely apply and meet criteria but are still not successful. Does the Agency track those applicants to make sure they don't fall through the cracks? Jen responded that staff is in the final weeks of completing the build for the new grants management system. They do have the ability to query and see how many times organizations apply and how many times they were successful, but there is no query that can find organizations that haven't

been successful. However, program teams know their applicant pools very well and have a clear view of who has not been successful. Michael added that the Agency's forthcoming race equity plan would address the entire grant system – how long it takes to complete an application, eligibility requirements, language and translation services, can the Agency hire people to do in-person translation of applications, how are we putting panels together, how do we train them, do we continue to evaluate artistic excellence, etcetera.

Karen Barry thanked Jen and stated that it is good to look at data see who is successful and who is not. Jen thanked Scott Hufford again for all of his work with regard to data, and said that she'd give an update by region and a big picture overview at a future meeting of the Grants Committee.

Michael then stated that a conversation was needed about the amount of double dipping that some organizations can do with the Agency's grant programs both in terms of the Agency's own grants and within Local Cultural Councils.

Cecil Barron Jensen asked how much staff using the SMU DataArts information they have collected from grantees who are required to submit information.

Michael stated that, from his prior experience at New Rep, the DataArts form is difficult for organizations and he is not sure Agency staff is using all the information.

Program Manager Sara Glidden explained that DataArts just went through a major revision and reduced the number of fields in its form. Staff uses the data frequently to assess the financial health of organizations, the information was also used in ArtsBoston's Arts Factor report.

Cecil then suggested that if the data is not being used, perhaps DataArts can be looked at as the Agency streamlines and finds another way of gathering data since DataArts is a heavy lift for organizations. Cecil acknowledges that some programs such as the Cultural Facilities Fund perhaps need more information, but let's make the issue of data collection less time consuming if possible.

Michael then told Committee Members he was doing a good deal of reverse engineering to see what the Agency really needed and to make sure our granting is diverse. His dream is that the Agency's grants are its product and grantmaking is our customer service tool. He'd like to see if the Agency can have all grant application processes take no more than one hour. Michael believes Mass Cultural Council will lead the states in this effort.

There being no further questions, Victoria asked for a motion to recommend the Supplemental Economic Recovery grant programs to the Council. Chair Nina

Fialkow moved to recommend the programs and Kathleen Castro seconded the motion. David Slatery called the roll and it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the Supplemental Economic Recovery Grants-Federal Funds and Supplemental Economic Recovery Grants-Massachusetts Funds programs described in the memorandum presented to this meeting.

Victoria moved to the next item on the agenda: the 2021 round of Gaming Mitigation Fund grants. Program Officer Cheyenne Cohn-Postell provided an update for Committee Members:

Cheyenne stated that the goal for the Gaming Mitigation program in its second cycle in FY22 is to refine the program that was built for the first cycle and see what those adjustments do to the applicant pool and general understanding of the process. During the first cycle staff received 53 applications. Fifty-two applications were eligible and received funding. There was a broad range of organizations in the applicant pool. After this initial round of funding 37 of the 52 successful applicants completed a feedback survey on the program. Staff also convened a focus group comprised of a wide array of first round applicants in order to garner feedback on the grant application.

One element that was heartily discussed was the definition of "touring artist." The program had one definition at the beginning of the process – an artist who makes their living by touring – this, however, isn't measurable or inclusive as some artists are represented by touring agencies and some aren't. What the team has come up with now to define a touring artist as: a guest artist presented by a performing arts organization with the caveat that if you are a producing company, you can count having a touring artist if they are a headliner whose name is used in marketing. Artists would have to provide a touring schedule (3 states in 3 years) and be represented by a reputable touring agency – Mass Cultural Council has six preferred touring agencies on its list.

The second clarification was reporting on eligible performances – one of the funding factors was percent of performances that included touring artists. During the first-round applicants could send that list anyway they liked. In the second round this will be templated in an effort to standardize and streamline.

The third was to have everyone in this second cycle report on calendar year 2019 for performances and fees paid to artists. This is due to the pandemic and 2020 being a year where barely any performances took place.

Jen Lawless added that these steps would help the Agency attract new applicants and encourage return applicants. Karen Barry asked for clarification on the grant cycle timing and deadline. Jen mentioned that this information is included in the memo sent to the Committee and that November 5, 2021 is the

deadline included in the proposed timeline. Karen followed up asking if Cheyenne was surprised by the applicant pool during the first round in terms of numbers and whether Cheyenne anticipated seeing more applications during the second round.

Cheyenne was not surprised by the volume of applicants but she was surprised by the range of organizations and the variety of work they produce. The goal of the tweaks staff is proposing to the application for the second cycle is to slightly lower the number of applicants because not everyone fit smoothly into the definition and guidelines. This will keep applicants and grantees closer to the statute; we will also attract new people that way.

Jen reminded Committee Members that this is a legislatively mandated program and creates a balancing act of staying true to the statute while providing enough support to organizations and reaching as many organizations as possible. Michael added that with more time and specificity it might open things up to more potential grantees.

Jo-Ann Davis asked Cheyenne to say a bit more about the funding and how the amount of each grant is determined.

Cheyenne explained that the program is formula funded based on two factors: the percent of performances that contain touring artists, and the amount of fees the organization paid to those artists including housing and travel. This is in an effort to determine how impacted organizations are and fund them accordingly. Jen added that this is also dependent on the total amount of money available and further clarified that the more an organization spends on presenting a touring artist, the higher their grant will be; the more of your business model that is dependent on touring artists, the higher your grant will be.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon then shared her feedback. First, regarding what goes into the formula: if we factor in artists who command higher prices, that can tip the scales. If an organization is presenting an array of artists but none with a very high fee, the risk and challenge to their budget is the same but the contribution of the grant will be less. Second is regarding Springfield. Barbara feels it is odd to see only \$6K of gaming funds going to Springfield since that is where the casino is located. Barbara feels the Agency needs to really look and make sure funds are going to the right activities in Springfield. Barbara is also surprised to see \$1K grants and is curious if there should be a floor and if that would make the program more worthwhile. Finally, Barbara asks if enough has been done to know where the groups are who are not applying for funding via this program and can staff have a better list by September.

Jen explained that staff did extensive outreach ahead of the first cycle, but if there are specific organizations Barbara and other Committee Members are surprised not to see, to please send the names of those organizations to

Cheyenne. Sara Glidden added that there were some organizations that started an application but did not finish it. Right up until the deadline staff members were calling those organizations and urging them to apply.

Barbara asked if the Springfield Jazz & Roots Festival had applied and Sara responded that they had not. Jen added that one of the challenges with Springfield is that MGM which owns the casino is also the managing entity of Symphony Hall.

Michael mentioned that he thought it was a weird-looking grant when he was still at New Rep and first encountered it, but his development staff applied anyway. Michael thinks the first year of any grant is always awkward.

Cheyenne agreed that outreach during the first cycle was extensive and added that a tactic moving forward would be to make herself available to applicants and to do more targeted recruitment. Jen added that this was why staff wanted to bring this to the May Council Meeting; so that the cycle can be announced with revised guidelines and so that there will be more lead time to prepare people to apply in the fall. Dave added that this is possible since the funds for this program are not tied to a fiscal year.

Victoria then asked for a motion to recommend the 2021 round of the Gaming Mitigation Program at the Council's meeting on May 18th. Karen Barry moved to recommend the new round of funding and Karen Hurvitz seconded the motion. David called the roll and it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the 2021 Round of the Gaming Mitigation Program described in the memorandum presented to this meeting

Victoria noted that the last item of business was to discuss the newly scheduled June meeting of the Grants Committee.

Michael explained that we would have a Grants Committee meeting on June 15th so that Committee Members can hear from each Agency department regarding its grant programs. Michael noted that while some programs will not be tweaked until the following year, this is an opportunity for Committee Members to provide feedback and ask questions about proposed program modifications for FY22.

Victoria then reminded Committee Members that the full Council would meet on May 18th at 11:30am. There being no further business, Victoria as Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:15am.