

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, MAY 4, 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
Jo-Ann Davis
Karen Hurvitz

Staff Members and Guests Present were

Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Public Engagement Manager
Maureen, a guest, who did not provide a last name or affiliation

Chair Victoria Marsh called the meeting to order at 3:02pm. Her first order of business was to let Committee Members know she would be stepping off the Council and therefore stepping down as Chair of the Grants Committee, after the next full meeting of the Council on May 18th. Victoria thanked Committee Members for their work under her leadership and stated that she is thrilled at the appointment of Executive Director Michael Bobbitt as the Agency is looking ahead at an exciting future.

Council Chair Nina Fialkow thanked Victoria for her service, then announced that Committee Member Jo-Ann Davis would take over for Victoria as Chair of the Committee. Jo-Ann thanked Nina and Victoria saying she was eager to do all she can to preserve the amazing legacy Victoria will leave.

Victoria then asked Michael Bobbitt for his update.

Michael let Committee Members know he has met with one-on-one with nearly every member of the Council. He has also had one-on-one meetings with each member of the staff and with each Agency department and it is clear staff is overextended. An All-Staff meeting was held to evaluate Agency programs and together staff settled on five elements against which to evaluate their programs: alignment with mission, scale or volume, depth of programming, fills an important gap, and community and constituency building.

Next, staff weighed each of these five elements as teams and determined the average across the Agency. The results of that exercise: 27% Alignment with mission, 15% scale or volume, 15% depth of programming, 18% fills an important gap, 25% community and constituency building. Staff also took time to list every program and grant they manage and rate them 1 to 4 – 1 being low, 4 being high – to gauge impact. The goal is to get all the Agency does to a 4. Staff is looking to see what we can eliminate, what we might combine, what can we give to LCCs, etcetera. This will all help determine the programming for the coming year. Michael stated that specifics would not be shared today, but he wanted to make Committee Members aware of the ongoing process. He does want to revise the Gateway Program application and the Cultural Investment Portfolio in general as he sees some inequities. Michael stated that he is not a fan of Project grants and would prefer to shift those funds to operating support. Staff will be present at the Committee meeting in June to give greater detail about what grants were and what they've shifted to. Michael says the process has been extremely inclusive and he believes Committee Members will be excited about the changes.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked to hear more about Michael's thoughts around Project grants as she thought of them as an entry door to the Council and wondered how else the Agency might address creating an entry point.

Michael responded that he'd rather have a lower level of operating support as an entry point and doesn't want to force applicants to produce a project since they are already doing projects anyway. Michael added that the Agency is working on a recruitment plan noting that sometimes we change processes and procedures, instead of more deliberately recruiting people to the programs we have.

Victoria believes this sounds like a fascinating process and that it is exciting to illuminate what Michael is seeing and to ask new questions.

Cecil Barron Jensen stated that she liked Michael's idea and approach and thinks the exercise he described is a great one for staff overall. She loves the idea of fewer projects and more operating support, especially as a person who runs a nonprofit organization herself. She also applauded Michael's ideas around recruitment and is eager to see what is next.

Michael stated that further information would be shared with the Race Equity Task Force, the full Council, and the staff soon. Michael added that Operations Director Jen Lawless is working very hard on the Agency's new grants management system which will consolidate all programs into one tool. Michael thinks of grantmaking as the Agency's product and of grantees as our customers and getting money should be as easy for them as possible. If an organization is spending two days on a Mass Cultural Council grant application, that is our fault. Michael would like to get every application process to take one hour; it should be like self-checkout at the grocery store.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked if the current review of programs included the Gaming Mitigation program.

Michael responded that yes, it did, and that the next round of the Gaming Mitigation program will be pushed to September as it has a good deal of elements that need to be evaluated and modified; staff is currently working on this.

Deputy Director David Slatery asked if Michael wanted to update Committee Members on the new funds from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Michael stated that the new funds came with new rules, but not too many. In an effort to save time and get money out to the field as quickly as possible, staff thought it best to refer back to the list of applicants to the Cultural Organization Economic Recovery program which the Agency administered in partnership with the Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development in December 2020 and to fulfill the funding requests of those applicants who had not been funded by program due to the fact that demand exceeded resources by 3 to 1. To make the program even more impactful, staff is suggesting addition of gaming funds to the sum of available money from the NEA so that \$1.4M or so would be available for grants. Grants will be capped at \$50K so that more organizations can be funded.

Jen Lawless added that the Agency wasn't able to fund 57% of the applications it received to the Cultural Organization Economic Recovery program. By lowering the cap, we will fund more organizations. We will also save everyone from applying again. David Slatery added that this idea will be more fully presented to the Committee at its meeting next week. Barbara Shaffer Bacon thinks it is a great idea and is happy also to see federal money going to local arts agencies.

Michael added that looking ahead the Agency could potentially see four new grant programs and one thing he hopes to focus on is capacity building grants; funds for marketing consultants, race equity consultants, new computers, new software, new staff, professional development, new equipment, financial consultants: we might see four new grant programs. Cecil mentioned that she has added capacity grants at her organization and they have been widely used, she feels investment in staff is important.

Michael hopes all programs can have larger budgets in the coming year. He is also holding an All-Staff calendaring meeting in an effort to avoid bottlenecks. MJB.

Victoria then asked David if he could provide an update on the schedule.

David stated that next week's meeting on May 11th would be a business meeting including a vote on Artist fellowship grants – all six disciplines, the proposal on the Gaming Mitigation program, and the proposal on combining NEA funds with gaming funds to fulfill some of the unfunded applications made to the Cultural Organization Economic Recovery program. An additional Grants Committee meeting focused on high-level planning will be scheduled for mid-June.

Karen Barry asked if materials for next week's Grants Committee meeting could be sent to Committee Members sooner rather than later and David said materials would be sent on Friday morning.

Victoria then thanked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for her leadership with Michael and the entire staff regarding budget advocacy noting that there were nine meetings scheduled with Senators this week alone. Karen Barry echoed Victoria's words about Bethann's work.

There being no further business, Victoria as Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:35pm.