

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

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL  
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

**MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2023**

**ONLINE MEETING**

**Committee Members Present** were

Jo-Ann Davis, Chair of the Grants Committee  
Marc Carroll, Acting Council Chair  
Barbara Schaffer Bacon  
Karen Barry  
Cecil Barron Jensen  
Kathleen Castro

**Also Present** were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Charles Baldwin, Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Lillian Lee, Deborah Kenyon, Kalyn King, Lisa Simmons, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, Carolyn Cole, and Sara Glidden.

Chair Jo-Ann Davis called the meeting to order at 9:01 am. She welcomed Committee Members and Agency staff 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.

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

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- 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 that 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.

Jo-Ann then asked Committee Members to approve the minutes of their last business meeting held on January 11, 2023. Barbara Schaffer Bacon moved to approve the minutes and Marc Carroll seconded the motion. There were no questions or discussion. By roll call vote and noting that Ché Anderson was absent, all other Committee Members were in favor, and it was

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee approves the minutes of the January 11, 2023 Grants Committee Meeting in the form presented to the Grants Committee at its June 12, 2023 Meeting.

Jo-Ann let Committee Members know the focus of the meeting would be a review of FY23 grantmaking activities and a preview of FY24 plans. She thanked the staff for their work to prepare for the meeting and asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt and Senior Director of Programs Jenifer Lawless to begin their presentation.

Michael let Committee Members know he was very excited to share the data included in the presentation with them and to being discussing plans for FY24; he also thanked staff who had worked hard on outreach efforts in FY23 and noted that moving to the Agency's new Grants Management System - which was key in obtaining the data the Committee would review today - has been a "dream come true."

Jen began by recognizing the Operations team who is continuing to work hard on paying out pandemic recovery grants. She then shared her screen and delivered a presentation on the Agency's FY23 grantmaking data noting that this fiscal year a massive number of grants have been distributed thanks to Michael's clear vision on how to improve reach and equity, and outreach efforts made by staff. Jen then presented a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Jen let Committee Members know to ask questions at any time during her presentation which also included analysis of how and to whom the grants were distributed.

Jo-Ann asked what percentage of pandemic recovery grants have been paid out at this point and Jen let her know that last she'd checked, 60% of grants awarded have been paid. She asked Catherine Cheng-Anderson, the Agency's Senior Director of Business Operations and Chief Financial Officer, to provide an update once one was available.

Jo-Ann asked if staff had excluded pandemic recovery grant numbers when making their comparison between FY22 and FY23 grantmaking and Jen confirmed staff was excluding it.

While Jen presented geographic data about FY23 grantmaking, Barbara asked if it would be possible to look at cities that had new applicants versus previous applicants since she is interested to know if in communities where no additional applicants were seen, perhaps different people and organizations applied. Jen will investigate this.

As Jen was presenting information about the change in demand by county, Karen Barry expressed that this information is extremely important; it is good to see growth in so many areas especially Worcester, Norfolk, and Bristol County; it also demonstrates where there is work still to be done.

Jo-Ann asked if this analysis did include pandemic recovery grant data and Jen explained that, yes, it does; every county saw a huge jump as a result of the pandemic recovery grant programs, but to Barbara's earlier point, the proportions did not change; there is still outreach work to be done and this data will shape the work moving forward.

Michael added that the number of applicants will grow in FY24, but the number of grants made will not since there will be no additional pandemic recovery funds like we had this year. Staff plans to engage in a cultural asset mapping project to help illuminate who in Massachusetts is potentially eligible and/or in need of Mass Cultural Council funding; this will inform how staff proposes allocating the Agency's grant dollars.

Jen explained that 7K of the 11K grant applications received this year were from individuals. Jo-Ann noted that managing expectations in FY24 could be a challenge given that the Agency will not have pandemic recovery funds to distribute.

Michael has been thinking a good deal about stewardship and where the Agency can point people if they do not receive a grant; advocacy work around funding will absolutely continue and later in the meeting Committee Members will see a presentation focused on how grants to individuals will be rethought for FY24. Building relationships with other agencies and sectors is a main driver behind the Agency's new

Strategic Plan as these agencies and sectors may have resources for artists and cultural organizations. Mass Cultural Council's funding will most likely not increase enough to accommodate demand, but if staff focuses on advancing the sector and making Massachusetts the best place for artists to live and work, there will be less pressure on grants. This will be a key focus for the next 18 months.

As Jen presented data comparing applications and approvals by county and then by city and town, she noted that 98% of Massachusetts cities and towns had a direct grant recipient in FY23. Karen suggested sticking with looking at data by municipality as breaking it down by community and county can cause confusion when the data is compared nationally.

Barbara added that having a decentralized program – the Local Cultural Council program – ensures the Agency is getting funding to every corner of the state; not every state has such a program.

Jen next shared an analysis of grantmaking to new applicants and the funding priorities staff enlisted to ensure funding reached them. She thanked former staff member Scott Hufford for his work making this data available.

Jo-Ann and Karen expressed that this data is impressive and perhaps the most important slide of the entire presentation.

Karen asked for more information regarding the pandemic recovery grant program extending eligibility to for-profit organizations. Michael explained that it is a priority to fund the entire cultural sector. For small BIPOC organizations gaining 501c3 status can be challenging; Michael noted that most "for-profit" arts organization are not actually making a profit. This is something that will be further examined through the cultural asset mapping project.

Barbara asked for clarification on what for-profit organizations were funded in FY22 and Jen explained that these organizations were funded through the AAPI Arts & Culture COVID-19 Recovery Program – a legislatively-mandated, one-time relief program established by the MA House Asian Caucus. Funding to for-profits was in the statute.

Karen added that is important to look at the compensation level for the directors of cultural organizations as some organizations who are receiving large Mass Cultural Council grants have directors who are making a good deal of money. This is something that Karen has always had a concern about.

Jen explained that for the pandemic recovery programs, staff took financial need into consideration in a very specific way; in FY24 staff will examine how to further define financial need. Michael added that it's important to remember that non-profit is a tax status, not a business model and it might be that the need is not necessarily greater for non-profits over for-profits.

While Jen reviewed grantees by discipline, gender, and age, Barbara commented that she would like to see further analysis on how various disciplines break down and how the Agency has seen disciplines change over time. Jen elaborated on this: the data is by grants and not by type of grantee.

Jen's presentation concluded with the Agency's focus for FY24:

- Continue program consolidations and redesigns.
- Continue progress on Racial Equity Plan and incorporate new Native/Indigenous and Deaf/Disability Equity plans.
- Contract with consultant to work on cultural landscape mapping to inform grantmaking and advancement efforts.
- Strategic plan implementation.

Before Committee Members were invited to ask questions, Catherine informed them that she had an update on the payment of pandemic recovery grants: 48% of grants to individuals and 83% of grants to organizations have been paid as of today. The staff processing the payments is working six days per week and the target to have the grant payments completed is August 31<sup>st</sup>.

Referring back to Jen's presentation Jo-Ann expressed that the data tells an excellent story about the work of the Agency; about the outreach and the depth and breadth of who is benefitting from it. This is a wonderful place from which to move forward.

Marc added that he appreciated the thoughtful way in which the data was presented and the fact that Committee Members were able to consider every demographic and see how the work moving forward would tie to the new Strategic Plan.

Jen then delivered a second presentation intended to give Committee Members a snapshot preview of how each grant program would operate and potentially evolve in FY24. Jen noted that staff is still in "draft mode" and working towards finalizing plans for the full meeting of the Council in August. Committee Members were invited to ask questions at the end of the presentation. A copy of this presentation is also available upon request. Key points included:

- The Cultural Investment Portfolio is in a transition year working towards launching a new operating support program to launch in FY25.
- The Gaming Mitigation program will see no major changes.
- Jen applauded the efforts of Timothea Pham and Kalyn King who administered the FY23 Festivals & Projects program and then quickly opened application for FY24. The Festivals & Projects program has continually evolved and grown over the years.

Cultural Districts and Local Cultural Councils will see no major changes.

- YouthReach and STARS will see no immediate changes, but staff is working towards a new program for FY25 that will seek to expand the number of programs and schools being served.

Universal Participation (UP) Innovation Fund grants will continue. The Innovation & Learning Network will pause for a second year with an eye toward scaling it up in FY25.

Grants to Artists will see several large changes; the one thing that is not changing

is that FY24 will be the second year of funding for two-year Traditional Arts Apprenticeship grants. Jen invited Program Manager Dan Blask to review some of the proposed changes for Committee Members.

Dan explained that the team is working to launch a new grant program for artists and creative individuals in the fall of 2023; there is still much to be decided. The work began with the Agency's Racial Equity Plan. The Artists team worked with Equity & Inclusion Program Officer Cheyenne Cohn-Postell to look at funding for artists through a racial equity lens; a number of their findings were reinforced in the new Strategic Plan. The three key points for the redesign are: advancing creativity; inclusive, not exclusive reach; and equity and access at every level so that all who practice see themselves in the program. The areas of focus include defining a new mission statement, creating an applicant-centered application process, broadening disciplines, removing anonymity and adding a narrative to applications, funding priorities, and building an equity-focused review process. The team is still working to determine the dollar amount of each grant. Michael has encouraged them to think about the concept of a living wage as they consider this. During the first year of the program the Agency will most likely be able to fund 300 artists and creative individuals. The goal is to eventually fund 500 per year.

Karen thanked Dan for his presentation and asked if staff is recommending that the anonymous application process be lifted entirely or if portions of the review process would still be anonymous.

Dan explained that staff is envisioning a process that will no longer be anonymous. Names would be known by application readers and a narrative would be included in each application. Staff is trying to take some of the elements that worked well in the previous Fellowship program and some of the elements that worked well in the pandemic recovery program for individuals, infuse them into the new program, and devise a new way of evaluating applications. He acknowledged that staff must learn more about participatory grantmaking and how to address conflicts of interest.

Karen expressed concern that the process would no longer be anonymous. She liked that panelists were looking exclusively at the work and not at the individual who created it. She wonders if this might increase bias in the evaluation process.

Michael shared that blind reviews have been shown to be the opposite of equity and contributed to a lack of resources for BIPOC applicants; that it is better to say, "We see you and we know you have been under-resourced." He added that staff has worked to increase representation on its review panels, but that even with a diverse group of reviewers the Agency still has money going mostly to white individuals.

Barbara asked what staff is thinking about in terms of participatory grantmaking acknowledging that this is a significant lift. Dan explained that there is still much to be determined but staff is envisioning a scoring mechanism based on the proposed program mission. Jen added that this is essentially reversing the mechanism used for Fellowships which was designed so reviewers chose the four best applicants. This process will have the goal of supporting creative expression and a commitment to the practice. The pandemic grant program received several very sincere applications from creative individuals who had been making art for as little as three years or as long as 30; what reviewers will look for is a commitment to the practice and an alignment with the mission of the program.

Jo-Ann noted that this is a significant change and asked if the plan is to bring the new program before the Council in August. She anticipates there will be a number of questions. Barbara agreed and asked if staff would seek input from the field on the new program.

Dan explained that elements of the new program would be shared with the field this month and feedback would be gathered via a survey. Jen added that the staff likes to be ambitious and that beyond creating a new grant program, business operations and fiscal are determining how best to serve grantees.

Marc likes the direction of the new program but has concerns that this is a large undertaking and that launching the program in the fall might be too challenging. He added that staff should consider the impact of AI on the work of artists and the work they might see included in applications.

Dan is hopeful that having readers (human readers) will help to surface AI-created art. Michael added that "fall" doesn't necessarily mean September.

There were no further questions or comments on the new Artists program.

Cecil Barron Jensen let staff know that she was happy to hear earlier in the presentation that the Social Prescription program is moving forward and expanding. Michael let Committee Members know that staff will be meeting with a group from the Office of the Attorney General in the coming weeks to talk about this program. The name of the organization enlisted to expand Social Prescription is Art Pharmacy, they are based in Georgia but do a good deal of work in New England.

Karen noted that she would like to be involved with outreach to tribal communities and is curious to hear more about the Agency's new Native/Indigenous Equity plan.

Michael let Karen know that he had several meetings with tribal leaders in December and that he plans to extend the Local Cultural Council program to include tribal councils. Since the Agency gives money to municipalities, tribes can be treated similarly. There is a focus group planned and the new plan will be crafted in the coming year.

Barbara added that the Ford Foundation has a program that might be of interest to the team as they undertake this new plan, she will send information about it to Michael.

At this point there were no further questions or discussion and the Committee had reached the end of its agenda. Jo-Ann, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 10:39am.