



Power of culture

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

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-SIXTY FIRST MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Rhonda Anderson
Emily Bramhall
Sherry Dong
Simone Early
Donna Haghightat
Cecil Barron Jensen
Anika Lopes
Petrina Martin
Diane Asadorian Masters
Allyce Najimy
Mark Snyder
Julie Wake

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Charles Baldwin, and Kate McDougall.

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:04am and asked Deputy Executive 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

Prepared on 2/22/24

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 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.

The Chair welcomed Council Members and staff to the meeting noting that there were several newly appointed Members present. As such, he asked each meeting participant to briefly introduce themselves. Each Council Member and then each member of the staff shared their name, in which Massachusetts community they live, a brief description of their professional background, and their connection to the cultural sector.

Marc then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the August 24, 2023 Council Meeting included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve the minutes. Sherry Dong moved to approve the minutes and Mark Snyder seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Kathleen Castro, Ann Murphy, and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the August 24, 2023 Council Meeting in the form presented.

Marc then gave his Chair's report. MassCreative hosted a successful advocacy day at the Massachusetts State House yesterday, January 24. The event was very well attended

and Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll both gave remarks in support of the cultural sector. Marc thanked new Council Member Julie Wake for attending. He then noted that in addition to the nine new appointments to the Council, since the Council last met, he had officially been named Chair and Jo-Ann Davis had been named Vice Chair. He also acknowledged some departures – Matthew Keator, Barbara Schaffer Bacon, Karen Barry, and Troy Siebels. Marc thanked those members for their service to Mass Cultural Council. He let Council Members know that as Chair, he would be establishing a new Advancement Committee and would be making new committee assignments for the Executive and Grants Committees; he hopes to have those assignments in place prior to the Council Retreat on March 21st. Finally, he let new appointees know they'd be paired with a Council Member who had served at least one year as part of their onboarding. Ann Petruccelli Moon will send emails this week to make introductions and share bios. He then asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael let Council Members know Ann will share calendar invitations for all upcoming meetings. She also sends a monthly update on the work of the Executive team that includes a summary of completed and forthcoming meetings and events he and/or Deputy Director Dave Slatery are attending. If Council Members see a meeting or event on the list they'd like to attend or know more about, please let Ann know. Advancement continues to be a major focus of Michael's work. Strong relationships across state government are being established as well as within other sectors – the Agency is especially focused on deepening relationships within healthcare, education, and economic development along with the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT).

Anika Lopes thanked the staff for the materials they shared with her as a new Council Member. They were informative and heightened her excitement.

The Chair asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her advocacy update.

Bethann echoed Marc's comments about Creative Sector Advocacy Day at the State House hosted by Emily Ruddock and her team at MassCreative. The event was attended by hundreds of artists and creative workers, legislators, Mass Humanities, MassArt, and Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). Bethann noted that Council Members who were not able to attend the event sent notes to their legislators to encourage and thank them for their support for the cultural and creative sector. The event occurred on the very same day Governor Healey released her budget recommendations for FY25. In her remarks at Creative Sector Advocacy Day the Governor shared with a very happy room that, while the budget was not public yet, she would be recommending an increase for Mass Cultural Council in FY25. Bethann says FY25 is being referred to across the board as a "belt tightening year" with revenues lower than expected and emergency measures taken to ensure the current year's budget is balanced. Tough decisions will need to be made with \$450 million less in the budget collectively for FY25. Mass Cultural Council has \$25 million in its line item in FY24; the Governor has proposed \$25.5 million in her H.2 budget proposal. This marks a slight increase for which the Agency is thankful. Bethann and Michael will have very deliberate budget conversations in the coming weeks; they have already met with Senator Paul Mark and Representative Mindy Domb, Co-Chairs of the Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development who were both very supportive. The Agency is starting the budget process in a strong position and Bethann will keep Council Members

updated as the process continues in March and May.

Mark Snyder thanked Bethann for helping him craft a message to his legislators and encouraged his fellow Council Members to do the same.

The Chair asked Senior Director for Program Operations Jen Lawless for her programs update.

Jen shared that the Programs team recently welcomed two new staff members: Sommers Smith, Program Officer, Communities and Summer Confuorto, Program Officer, Traditional Arts. Longtime Folk Arts & Heritage Program Manager Maggie Holtzberg has retired after nearly 25 years with Mass Cultural Council.

Jen shared a presentation (copies of which are available upon request) including an update FY24 grantmaking activity to date along with the results of an applicant survey staff had deployed in support of their efforts to simplify application processes and make them applicant centered. The survey appeared at the end of FY24 grant applications and was optional and anonymous. Seven thousand out of 19,000 applicants took the survey. The results were largely positive and were included, along with the update on FY24 grantmaking activity in the presentation.

Jen also shared an update on the Tribal Task Force the Agency has established to help expand the Local Cultural Council program to include and support tribal governments (and other programs). The Task Force met twice. Both meetings were informative and productive and helped staff learn how to better support tribal communities. New Council Member Rhonda Anderson is a member of the Task Force. She shared that there was a great deal of deep listening and learning and a strong desire to understand during the meetings. She hopes we can inspire other cultural councils across the country to do the work of honoring tribal sovereignty. Jen shared her appreciation for our consultant (and former Outreach Coordinator to the Native American and Indigenous community) Erin Genia who provided incredible support and guidance and helped shape the Task Force. The goal is to have recommendations for FY25 Tribal Cultural Council funding included at the August Council Meeting. Jen thanked the Communities team for their support of this work.

Jen concluded with a brief update on the cultural asset inventory project. The project will support the Agency's program and advancement work by taking a deep dive and looking at data across the Commonwealth that will help the Agency identify new individuals and organizations and bolster its outreach efforts. Diversity North has been contracted to work with the Agency on this project; and there are several partners throughout Massachusetts who have agreed to support the work. Michael mentioned a few of those partners: The Boston Foundation, Nike Converse, Essex Community Foundation, Greater Lowell Community Foundation, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, The New Commonwealth Fund, and Cambridge Community Foundation.

The Chair thanked Jen and then asked Michael to introduce the next presenter: Chris Appleton of Art Pharmacy, the organization Mass Cultural Council has partnered with to expand its Arts on Prescription work.

Michael welcomed Chris to the meeting and explained that Mass Cultural Council has been working to find ways to use the arts to support people in their healthcare journeys

for several years through its CultureRx initiative. This work supports health equity and has been proven to make a significant contribution to improving mental health. Last year Michael, along with Program Manager Erik Holmgren and Program Officer Käthe Swaback, began the process of scaling the program with the goal of giving every person in Massachusetts access to an arts prescription written by their doctor. In order to do this, the Agency needed a partner and Chris Appleton of Art Pharmacy is that partner. He is here to tell you more.

Chris stated that the Mass Cultural Council is not just a leader in this work but rather, the leader in advancing social prescribing across the country. He then shared a presentation with the Council that provided an overview of the work; which presentation is available upon request.

After the presentation Rhonda Anderson thanked Chris. As the founder of Ohketeau Cultural Center, Rhonda has worked with the Massachusetts Health Equity Network through the UMass School of Public Health. There are several health-related issues within indigenous communities, many of which were brought to a head during the pandemic. Ohketeau Cultural Center works to engage the community through the healing power of traditional arts. Rhonda would love to hear more about Chris's work and see how she can help spread the word within the indigenous community. Chris stated that he would love to share more with Rhonda as well as learn from her.

Anika Lopes also expressed gratitude for Chris's work. As the founder of the Ancestral Bridges Foundation, she has seen overwhelmingly how many older adults have suffered from isolation and depression, or not receiving proper care if they hurt themselves. She noted that seeing the mental health crisis for both older adults and young people along with inequities in healthcare makes her very excited and eager to learn more about arts on prescription. Chris thanked Anika for her feedback and mentioned that earlier this week he'd connected with the Healthcare Plan of Western Massachusetts; he is eager to learn more about other opportunities in the region.

Julie Wake asked if Chris could explain a bit more about the process for cultural organizations who would like to participate in the program; what the benefits of participating are and how long reimbursement takes. Chris explained that cultural partners are paid before the recipient visits the organization and are paid retail rate. The process to become a participating organization is simple: organizations pre-register and qualify online and then participate in a live 20-minute interview to ensure the venue is meeting a standard of care. They are asked to specify activities or engagements that would fit the model – and that's it.

Simone remarked that this is a wonderful program. She previously worked with the Department of Housing and Livable Communities. There are 240 housing authorities across the state. She is wondering how they might become involved as residents experience quite a bit of isolation. Chris would love to connect with Simone to explore this more as there may be mental health programs already in existence within the housing authorities that he could plug into.

Michael let Council Members know that Chris's presentation will be shared with them. There were no further questions or comments, so Marc asked Dave to move to the next item on the agenda: review and approval of the Agency's revised travel policy.

Dave stated that at the August 2019 Council Meeting a new out-of-state staff travel policy was adopted. Shortly thereafter, the pandemic started and as a result staff travel was almost fully paused for some time. The policy stated that all out-of-state travel by staff must be approved by the Governing Council. The Governing Council could delegate this to the Executive Committee if necessary. By 2022, when travel again became more routine, there were a number of out-of-state travel requests that were mostly day trips to other New England states to meet with New England cultural partners. Staff found that they were pulling the Executive Committee together frequently for Special Meetings to approve these rather routine requests with relatively low costs and mileage reimbursements which was perhaps not the best use of Committee members' time or in the spirit of the original policy; it was decided that they would propose a revised policy. The revised policy was presented to the Executive Committee in October and again earlier this month. Revisions to the policy are summarized below:

- Under the policy, "Out of State Travel" will not include expenses related to travel from Massachusetts to the other New England states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut) as long as such expenses do not include any airfare, overnight lodging or registration fees in excess of \$800.
- Travel which is fully subsidized by another party (and has been disclosed and approved in accordance with the ethics law) and does not require expenditure of agency funds will not require pre-approval of the Executive Committee or Council but will be reported to the Executive Committee at the next occurring meeting.
- If, after attempts to convene a meeting, the Chair determines it is not possible to assemble a quorum of the Executive Committee to consider a time-sensitive out of state travel request prior to the date of travel, the Chair may review and decide upon the approval of such request individually provided that the Council and Committee is informed at the next occurring meeting.

The revised policy in its entirety was included in the meeting materials sent to Council Members one week prior to the meeting. Staff is today asking the Council to adopt the recommendation of the Executive Committee and approve the policy. Dave let Council Members know the vote is included on page 3 of their meeting materials.

Ché Anderson moved to approve the policy, Simone Early seconded the motion. At this point, Sherry Dong and Allyce Najimy had left the meeting. By roll call vote and noting that Kathy Castro, Ann Murphy, and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were also absent it was

RESOLVED: to adopt and approve the Council's Revised Out of State Travel Approval Policy as presented.

Marc then asked Senior Director of Business Operations & Chief Financial Officer Cathy Cheng-Anderson for her report.

Cathy shared key highlights of her team's work. Notably, that we are halfway through the fiscal year, she reported that spending is either on target or slightly under budget in most areas, with an expectation of increased spending in the latter half of the year as invoices are processed. She noted completion of internal audits and reconciliations for

the 2023 calendar year, ensuring accuracy and compliance with Commonwealth, state, and federal laws. Cathy expressed satisfaction with the implementation of a new electronic grant payment processing system, which has notably processed over 500 additional grant payments compared to the previous year's midpoint. This improvement not only expedites funding to grantees but also reduces the organization's reliance on paper files. Cathy highlighted the organization's heightened focus on Fraud and Risk mitigation strategies. This includes mandatory Fraud Mitigation and Awareness training for all staff, emphasizing the importance of understanding risks and detection methods related to potential fraud in grantmaking and financial management. She also mentioned that the training includes information on statewide hotlines for reporting any instances of fraud, waste, abuse, or illegal activities. Additionally, there has been a significant investment in the security of digital assets and information systems through a comprehensive Cyber Security Mitigation and Training Program. This program encompasses annual cybersecurity training, monthly cybersecurity learning campaigns, and monthly modern workplace technology series to keep staff updated and proficient in technology. Cathy then asked Program Officers Charles Baldwin and Cheyenne Cohn-Postell for their update on Cultural Equity and Access Initiatives.

Charles shared that he joined the Agency to lead the UP Initiative which provided both learning and funding to steward organizational understanding of disability and the barriers people experience at cultural institutions. As the Agency looks to broaden the reach and growth of this program, it invested in working with consultants to ensure a "with me not for me" understanding of the needs of people with disabilities to inform next steps and create a d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan. Over the last few weeks, he had been reading and processing the report of recommendations to apply an achievable timeline for the Agency to adopt, both on internal procedures as well as external policies supporting the sector.

Cheyenne explained what operationalizing large portions of the Racial Equity Action Plan looks like. She highlighted the collaboration between the Cultural Equity and Access (CEA) team and various program teams to read through guidelines and FAQs for readability and accuracy of relevant information, the CEA team taking on a role in Festivals & Projects application review for related criteria and priority points, and the team orchestrating the simultaneous interpretation of the Creative Individuals program information session into American Sign Language and Spanish. The session was attended by over 300 participants with more than 200 questions asked and answered. Lastly Cheyenne reported that the 4th session of the Cultural Equity Learning Community (CELC) hosted by Arts Connect International has extended their registration for the summer session. The Agency is underwriting the tuition for 250 MA based cultural workers.

There were no questions for Cathy, Charles, or Cheyenne. Marc thanked them for their presentations and asked if there were any further questions from the Council. There were none and the end of the meeting agenda had been reached. Marc let Council Members know he was looking forward to meeting with them over the coming weeks and seeing them at the Council Retreat and Meeting in March. As Chair, he adjourned the meeting at 11:52am.