



Power of culture

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

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Che Anderson
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Cecil Barron Jensen
Karen Barry
Kathleen Castro
Jo-Ann Davis
Sherry Dong
Simone Early
Karen Hurvitz
Matthew Keator
Susan Leff
Ann Murphy
Rob Price
Troy Siebels

Absent Council Members were

Lillian Do
Allyce Najjimy

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Charles Baldwin, Luis Cotto, Erik Holmgren, Maggie Holtzberg, Carina Ruiz-Esparza, Scott Hufford, Evelyn Nellum, Sara Glidden, Michael Ibrahim, Mina Kim, Lisa Simmons, Kelly Bennett, Käthe Swaback, Carmen Plazas, and Cheyenne Cohn-Postell; and guests Quita Sullivan, Marian Taylor-Brown, Stacy Klein, Rhonda Anderson, and Deidra Montgomery.

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 3:12pm and extended a welcome to her fellow Council Members, Agency staff, and guests. She then asked Deputy Director

Prepared on 10/6/21

David Slatery to take a roll call and read the Open Meeting Law into record. David took the roll the attendance of Council Members present at such time is listed above. David then read the following statement into the record.

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. As a safety measure, in order to prevent disruption of Mass Cultural Council's on-line open public meetings, the Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Committee of Mass Cultural Council has asked staff to implement the following protocols for on-line meetings of Mass Cultural Council or its committees:

Any "chat" or similar function will be disabled.

Other than Council members, invited guests or individuals specifically recognized by the Chair of the meeting, attendees will be muted and have no ability to share media or documents or project or type images or text.

All attendees must enter a waiting room and digitally sign-in before being admitted.

Any attendee who nonetheless causes a disruption will be summarily removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

While Mass Cultural Council welcomes the public to attend its on-line meetings under the Open Meeting Law, any attempts to disrupt a meeting will result in immediate expulsion of the responsible party.

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 first notify the Chair and must 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.

During the roll call Sherry Dong let the Chair know that she would need to leave the meeting at 3:40pm. Nina then asked Vice Chair Marc Carroll to explain the Council's new Zoom protocols. Marc explained that due to a disruption during a recent Special Meeting of the Executive Committee during which racist comments were entered into the chat, staff had implemented an extra step before admitting guests from the waiting room into today's meeting in that each guest was contacted via chat to determine their interest in attending the meeting. Also, the chat feature for the meeting was disabled along with participants' ability to change their names onscreen.

Nina then welcomed guests Rhonda Anderson from Okheteau Cultural Center, Quita Sullivan from the New England Foundation for the Arts, Marian Taylor Brown and Deidra Montgomery from the Cultural Equity Learning Community, and Stacy Klein from Double Edge Theater who were invited by Executive Director Michael Bobbitt to give brief remarks during the meeting. Each guest briefly introduced themselves.

The Chair then asked Michael to give a brief update and introduction to the Agency's draft Racial Equity Plan which the Council would vote on today.

Michael explained that the Plan being presented to the Council today is the culmination of five months of work by the Racial Equity Task Force, which is comprised of Council Members and staff, and input from colleagues around the nation. More than 60 individuals have provided input on the Plan at this point. This has been a tremendous lift with an incredible amount of vetting. It has been an inclusive process which follows in the spirit of the Plan. Michael is most excited to see the state's investment in arts and culture align with the Governor's order around race equity and the Agency's strategic plan. This plan is outlining a roadmap that will push us beyond talking the talk. Michael noted that there were concerns from Council Members at their meeting on August 24th around the use of the word "decolonization" in the Plan. Many suggestions made during the meeting were agreed upon. To further understanding of the term, staff sent reading material in advance of today's meeting and held a non-deliberative session last Friday as an opportunity for Council Members and staff to learn more about decolonization as it applies to grantmaking within arts and culture. Today Council Members will review this revised version of the plan and hear from invited guests, some of whom are Native American, about the importance of including the term "decolonization" in the Plan. Michael then asked Marian Taylor Brown and Deidra Montgomery to give their presentation.

Marian and Deidra focused their comments on the concepts of colonization and decolonization as terms to be used internally and externally, and what both terms mean with regards to Agency policies. The presentation was grounded in the recognition that words and representation matter and when people are not represented, harm can be done. A copy of the presentation Marian and Deidra shared with Council Members is available upon request.

Michael thanked Marian and Deidra for their comments and told Council Members that they are experts in their field. At this point, Sherry Dong let the Chair know that she had to leave the meeting but wanted to make sure that when a vote was taken that her position was heard – Sherry supported the Plan and the efforts Michael is leading and encourages her fellow Council Members to be supportive of them, too. Sherry then departed the meeting.

Michael then let Council Members know that in addition to the previous presentation on decolonization as a term, he also wanted them to hear on a more personal level why including the term in the Plan is important. He then invited Quita Sullivan from the New England Foundation for the Arts to speak.

Quita explained that she is speaking to Council Members as both a funder and a Native person. Quita moved to Massachusetts in 2000 from the Midwest and stated that she felt more erased in the Commonwealth than she ever did in her previous home. Therefore, decolonization is a very real and very present thing in her life and a significant part of who she is and all the things she hopes to be. Quita stated that philanthropy exists because of the genocide and disposition of land for black and indigenous people, because of the exploited labor of Asian and Latinx people; that the government and many private foundations have benefitted from those extractions and by those extractions are able to engage in philanthropic work. Every dollar earned, spent, or given is, at a minimum, generated on stolen land. She added that philanthropy becomes necessary because those systems based in genocide continue to determine the well-being of those whom we are helping. Quita stated that she is conscious of the fact that her participation in philanthropy as an indigenous person is not the norm, and may be problematic, but she believes she can change the way grantmaking is accomplished. She tries to not let “perfect” get in the way of action. Decolonization of grantmaking within arts and culture isn't going to happen in one day, but it also isn't going to happen at all if we are afraid to take steps and to move forward on Racial Equity work and include the concept of decolonization in it.

Michael thanked Quita and then asked Rhonda Anderson from the Ohketeau Cultural Center and Stacy Klein from Double Edge Theater to speak briefly about their partnership and how decolonization appears in their work.

Rhonda began by stating the decolonization is not a metaphor, that when it is seen as a metaphor it kills the possibility of what it can accomplish and recenters whiteness, resettles theory, and extends innocence to the settler. She added that the term cannot easily be grafted onto preexisting discourse. Stacy shared that decolonization is a daily practice and effort for Double Edge Theatre and that the leadership of Rhonda and her colleague Larry Spotted Crow Man has been extremely valuable in her learning. The partnership between Ohketeau and Double Edge began in 2017 when Stacy contacted

Rhonda and offered her the use of space on Double Edge's site. Stacy, at that point, had been told that there were no tribes in the area and there never had been. Rhonda set about introducing Stacy to other indigenous people and tribes in the region and a partnership was established. The use of space at Double Edge Theatre is important to Rhonda because a good deal of it is outdoors unlike the majority of the spaces in the region, many of which are part of the five colleges. Ohketeau was able to make a fire pit for a recent ceremony. The two organizations now have an incredibly strong relationship where they are both learning how deeply decolonization needs to be broken down. Building relationships with reciprocity and understanding that decolonization is an ongoing process, not a historical one. Both organizations are working together to decolonize, lift, and center indigenous people.

Nina thanked Rhonda, Stacy, Quita, Marian, and Deidra for their presentations and for adding to her personal understanding of decolonization. Nina noted that the Executive Committee had reviewed the draft Racial Equity Plan at its Special Meeting on September 13 and voted to recommend it for full approval by the Council today. Nina then asked Vice Chair Marc Carroll to summarize the changes to the Plan that were reviewed at the Executive Committee meeting.

Marc stated that the Committee confirmed that the Racial Equity Plan is an extension of the work started in 2017 which aligns with the Agency's strategic plan and the Governor's executive order. A statement of purpose was added to the beginning of the document. Links that led to Wikipedia were deleted. The term "decolonization" was clarified and tied to the cultural sector and the Agency's grantmaking and services. Finally, links relating to social justice movements the Agency has no formal agreement with were deleted. After reviewing these changes, the Executive Committee voted unanimously to approve and recommend the Plan. Marc thanked all members of the Racial Equity Task Force for working hard to improve the Plan based on Council Member feedback.

Nina then asked Council Member Barbara Schaffer Bacon who served on the Racial Equity Task Force, to present the plan to the Council.

Barbara stated that the Task Force followed a very open process. Michael didn't come into the first meeting with a plan already drafted, but rather there was a gathering of ideas about what the Agency could do. Barbara highlighted what Quita Sullivan had mentioned about not letting perfection hinder progress. Barbara feels the Racial Equity Plan is solid and that the final round of vetting between the Council's last meeting on August 24 and today was very important. Barbara is very pleased and proud that the Task Force dug in to be sure what the Council is signing onto is clearly understood. The Plan is a living document that will be revisited in an evaluative form as we move forward.

Barbara then moved for a vote to approve Mass Cultural Council's Racial Equity Plan as it was approved and recommended by the Executive Committee. Simone Early seconded the motion. The Chair asked if there was any discussion and recognized Council Member Rob Price.

Rob thanked the Task Force for their work assembling the document and the guest speakers for giving important substance to the dialogue but stated that he has concerns that persist:

First, the reference to intersectionality which excludes religious and national identity. Rob feels these dimensions could have easily been included and often are in DEI statements he is familiar with. He feels that the inclusion of intersectionality invites some into the conversation but excludes others. He is apprehensive about this given that the Agency serves many different voices in the Commonwealth.

Second, while decolonization has been qualified in most cases throughout the document - all except for one – its centrality persists. Rob understands in the context of the voices in today's meeting why the feeling is that it should, however the workshop on decolonization last Friday and the content presented in today's meeting raised as many questions as answers for him. Rob reviewed all the source materials referenced and he feels a fundamental problem emerges. Marian and Deidra shared a definition of colonization today from the Lexico Dictionary but did not share a definition of decolonization from the same source, instead they offered three other definitions of decolonization. Rob then read for Council Members the definition of decolonization he found in the Lexico Dictionary: *the action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony leaving it independent.*

Rob added that while Michael and others have insisted that the term is meant metaphorically in the Plan, the materials that were shared with the Council and one article in particular Rob has read called "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" he feels indicate that decolonization ties directly to the word colonization.

Rob stated that he raises this as an issue because he does not feel the Council should vote on something it isn't ready to follow through on. Rob then gave an example of what decolonization would mean to an organizations like Boston Ballet. Rob stated that Boston Ballet is a product of western civilization and an import by colonizers with an upcoming season highlighting mostly western culture. The Artistic Director is an older, white European male. On its website the Ballet acknowledges that it sits on the lands of the Pawtucket. Rob continued stating that most of the Ballet's patrons are white and affluent and its audiences are mostly white. Rob stated that decolonization of Boston Ballet would call for dramatic action. It would mean repatriation of the Opera House to the descendants of the Pawtucket, programming would need to change, the

revenue model would need to change, staffing would need to change, and it would be hard for the Agency to not look at Boston Ballet and many other organizations it currently supports as prototypical examples of colonized institutions. Rob feels that if we are using the term colonization as its defined by many academics, it requires the Council to understand what it is voting on. He feels the Racial Equity Plan could have achieved almost everything it intends to achieve without the inclusion of this term.

Nina asked if there were other Council Members who wished to discuss the plan. There were not and she recognized Michael Bobbitt who stated that the Council is not meeting to debate the validity of a concept but rather to vote on a set of actions. Michael reminded the Council that as a grantmaker the Agency has no jurisdiction over how organizations program. The goal of the plan is to ensure the Agency's funding decisions are equitable

There was no further discussion and Nina asked David Slatery to do a roll call vote for the approval of the Racial Equity Plan. Noting that 3 Council Members were absent (Sherry Dong, Lillian Do and Allyce Najimy) and 1 abstention (Rob Price) and 14 yes votes (all other present members) and it was

RESOLVED: To approve Mass Cultural Council's Racial Equity Plan as recommended by the Executive Committee in the form provided to the Council for this Meeting.

As the request of Council Member Barbara Schaffer Bacon, David noted for the record that Sherry Dong had indicated before she left the meeting early that she had indicated her support for the Plan.

Nina thanked Council Members for attending the Special Meeting and for their service and congratulated all for passing the Racial Equity Plan. As Chair, Nina adjourned the meeting at 4:05pm.