



Power of culture

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Ché Anderson, Co-Chair
Diane Asadorian Masters
Allyce Najimy
David Sun Kong
Marc Carroll – ex officio
Jo-Ann Davis – ex officio

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Senior Director of Business Operations & Chief Financial Officer
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
Carolyn Cole, Special Projects Manager for Advancement
Erik Holmgren, Manager of Strategic Partnerships & Advancement
Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager

Co-Chair Ché Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:04am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

Ché thanked David and asked Committee Members if they'd reviewed the minutes from their last meeting held on October 30th, 2024. If they had, he would look for a motion and a second to approve those minutes. Diane Asadorian Masters moved to approve the minutes; Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Committee Co-Chair Iván Espinoza-Madrigal and Committee Members Petrina Martin, Rhonda Anderson, Anika Lopes, and David Sun Kong were absent it was unanimously

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RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the October 30, 2024 Advancement Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Committee Member David Sun Kong joined the meeting a short time after the vote was taken.

Ché let Committee Members know he'd spoken with his Co-Chair, Iván in preparation for his report today. He is excited about several recent introductions made between Executive Director Michael Bobbitt and potential partners. He acknowledged that there is concern within the cultural sector regarding the potential impacts of federal policy changes. He expressed gratitude for colleagues within the Commonwealth who want to partner with and support the arts and for Agency staff and members of the Governing Council who are actively working to leverage these new relationships. He also mentioned that earlier this week Governor Healey had signed an Executive Order creating the first-ever Massachusetts Poet Laureate, showing that even in challenging times there are ways to access and uplift culture and creativity. He concluded by sharing that he'd met yesterday with Senator Michael Rodrigues, Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means.

There were no questions for Ché. He asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his report.

Michael shared that he is excited to begin his 5th year as the Agency's Executive Director and that he is thrilled the Agency is continuing to make history. With regards to federal funds, the Agency is slated to receive \$1.2M from National Endowment for the Arts in FY25 and the final 20% has been requested. If the request is denied, staff has a back-up plan and will keep Council Members posted. He gave a quick update on the work of the Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council which is chaired by Secretary Yvonne Hao who is also a member of the Agency's Governing Council. The CPDAC met in October, was divided into 4 working groups, and developed top priorities. On January 22, all groups reconvened, and 12 recommendations were submitted to the Executive Office of Economic Development for their consideration. The Governor will decide which recommendations move forward on April 30 during Creative Sector Day at the Massachusetts State House. As Ché mentioned, on Monday the Governor instituted the state's first poet laureate program. Michael will chair the nominating committee, and Mass Cultural Council, in partnership with Mass Humanities, will administer the application process. We hope the Governor will find funding for this position in FY26 or that legislation will be introduced to support it. Iván has been working with East Boston community members to explore the creation of a cultural district, with Bain Capital offering support. We're also monitoring the impact of federal government changes and will keep you updated. The cultural asset mapping project continues to reveal surprising insights about the size of the cultural sector. Jen and Bethann are preparing materials for a tour to share for the findings. This is an exciting opportunity for advocacy, but it will require the sector to develop business acumen and become more civically engaged. We need to push leaders to act on the policies that will be rolled out. In response to the elimination of the MCAS as a graduation requirement, a K-12 graduation requirements council has been formed. Mass Cultural Council made a request to be added and just received confirmation that our name will be put forward. We're also collaborating with MOTT and EOED on various initiatives, including the live theater tax credit. Finally, work

on MITx continues and the Agency is collaborating with Open Door Arts' on their assessment tool and the UP innovative learning platform.

There were no questions for Michael. Ché asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her Legislative update.

Bethann shared that the new legislative session began on January 1, and over 7,000 bills have been filed. Bethann sees bills as conversation starters. The Agency will monitor bills of interest to the sector, and has filed 2 as well. The first, working with Senator Paul Mark, aims to amend the Cultural Facilities Fund statute which currently states that municipal facilities have to be a certain number of years old and/or a certain size in order to be eligible for funding. This is a barrier to many facilities; the bill will seek to strike that language. Bethann clarified that when the Agency speaks of municipally owned facilities, it is also welcoming tribal-owned facilities. Senator Mark is particularly interested in this bill as there was a facility in his district that was not eligible to apply for CFF because they did not meet the requirements pertaining to facility size and longevity. The second bill, a technical correction to change the term STEM to STEAM in law, is being worked on with Representative Mindy Domb. It proposes adding A for arts thereby aligning arts with education and economic development priorities. This change, which doesn't require funding, is expected to foster better discussions about the value of the arts and creativity in these areas. Regarding the budget, the Governor's FY26 budget (released in January) included a slight increase for Mass Cultural Council, which is a strong starting point. We're continuing to push for \$28M in funding and will meet leaders in the House and Senate to gain their support before budget discussions begin. Lastly, there are several upcoming public events, including a celebration of CDI investment grants in Lowell on February 13 at 1 p.m., which will feature a special performance by a local theater group. If Committee Members are interested in attending, they should reach out to Bethann or Christian Kelly. Bethann is thrilled that Chair Marc Carroll will attend and that Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis may attend as well.

There were no questions for Bethann. Ché asked Michael to introduce the next agenda item: an update on Mass Cultural Council's Advancement work.

Michael shared that out of 250 applicants the Agency hired Erik Holmgren and Carolyn Cole as its new Advancement team, reporting to Deputy Executive Director Dave Slatery. Erik is Manager of Strategic Partnerships and Advancement; Carolyn is Special Projects Manager for Advancement. Today Erik and Carolyn will provide an update on their work in recent months as they've started to build this new business at Mass Cultural Council.

Erik and Carolyn delivered a substantial presentation on the Agency's advancement work including the work on building advancement infrastructure, a re-design of the Cultural Districts Initiative with an eye towards cross sector collaboration, the Agency's continued work on Social Prescription, and an update on several exciting new partnerships that are in the works. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

After the presentation, Diane Asadorian Masters stated that if changes come at the federal level and the Agency loses its National Endowment for the Arts funding, a lot of organizations in Massachusetts would be negatively impacted. She asked if the Agency had a plan for educating the field and what preparations might be taking place.

Michael shared that the Agency receives \$1.2M from the NEA each year. The Agency had already received \$800K for this year and during today's meeting received word that the remaining \$400K had been approved. Moving forward, we'll work with partners like Americans for the Arts and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies to frame the messaging should we need to react. The main point for the sector is to get organized and start thinking about how to increase influence. It's also an opportunity for the sector to gain more control over its financing, reducing reliance on contributed revenue. While this isn't a complete solution, it's a chance for the sector to start behaving differently.

There were no further questions. Ché moved to the final agenda item: plans for a new awards ceremony. He asked Public Relations & Events Manager Christian Kelly to give an update.

Christian let Committee Members know there was a full memo in their meeting books that outlines the plans thus far to launch the new Massachusetts Medal of Arts in March 2026. The awards ceremony will aim to recognize and uplift arts and culture champions. Staff is seeking feedback from Committee Members on what the awards will recognize and suggestions for naming them. Christian noted that one award would be a named award focused on equity.

The timeline is as follows:

- May 15: Public nomination process opens
- Summer: Agency staff will review nominations and narrow down the list
- August: Present the list to the full Council for approval
- Fall/Winter into next year: Work with award recipients to produce content for the awards ceremony itself.

Chair Marc Carroll asked if Christian was seeking names and suggestions today, or if he was asking the Committee to think about it. Christian explained that all ideas are welcome now or in the future and that Committee Members can email their thoughts. It was decided that a brief survey would be shared with the Committee to collect their input. Christian and Bethann will create and send this survey, with the goal of collecting feedback in the coming weeks.

Diane inquired as to the name of the awards – Massachusetts Medal of Arts – given that there would be multiple medals distributed. Staff will continue to think about the name as the plans come together but it was noted that the Presidential Medal of Freedom is given to multiple recipients each year.

Allyce Najimy applauds Michael and staff for reimagining the bi-annual awards ceremony and honoring those who champion the sector as opposed to the sector itself. Allyce suggested that celebrity presenters with ties to Massachusetts be recruited to present awards during the ceremony and a few preliminary ideas were shared.

It was briefly discussed whether there would be a special Chair's Award or a Council's Award as part of the program and Chair Marc Carroll expressed a preference for there to be a Council's Award.

It was clarified that the awards ceremony will be held bi-annually, and that it would most likely be held in Boston in the early evening and align with Creative Sector Day at

the Massachusetts State House. There is no venue yet, and there is the possibility that the Agency may need to fundraise to cover the cost of the event depending how the FY26 budget process progresses.

There were no further questions. The end of the meeting agenda had been reached and Ché, as Co-Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:11am.