

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2023

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present

Marc Carroll, Acting Chair
Ché Anderson
Jo-Ann Davis
Troy Siebels

Staff Members Present

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Operations
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Senior Director of Business Operations and Chief Financial Officer
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Manager of Executive Affairs
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager

Acting Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:01am 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 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, in order 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 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.

Marc then asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 4th Executive Committee Meeting and the September 18th Special Executive Committee Meeting. Ché moved to approve the two sets of minutes, Jo-Ann seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Sherry Dong was absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee approves the minutes of the August 4, 2023 and September 18, 2023 Executive Committee Meetings in the form presented to the Executive Committee

Marc took a moment to congratulate Michael Bobbitt on being named to the Boston Business Journal's 2023 Power 50 List and Carmen Plazas on being named to the AmplifyLatinX 100 list. He then turned to the next item on the agenda: upcoming out-of-state travel proposed by Agency staff. Under the current travel policy any out-of-state travel by staff must be approved by the full Council or the Executive Committee.

Michael outlined the proposed travel for the Committee. The Communities First New England Regional Convening takes place October 16-18th in Providence, Rhode Island. Communities First is a national coalition focused on "transforming how federal, state, and local governments invest public dollars in Black, Indigenous, People of Color and low-wealth communities by implementing a relationships-first approach to communitydriven solutions that centers frontline communities' leadership, innovation, and priorities." The organization contacted Mass Cultural Council in furtherance of the "power of the arts and artists to advance equitable planning, policymaking, and systems change" and desire "to bring that creative energy and perspective to bear on local planning and implementation at this critical moment as an important component of the work in local communities to unlock the federal resources available and actualize ...climate & racial justice commitments" contained in recently-passed federal legislation. To that end, Communities First is hosting a regional New England convening to foster greater coordination among community partners, state/local leaders, philanthropic funders, capacity builders, technical assistance providers, and practitioners in order to support communities' ability to access federal resources available and ensure federal programs deliver on their transformative promises. Staff proposes that Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Senior Director of Business Operation and Chief Financial officer and Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations, attend to learn more and join the discussion on the allocation and implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and how it might apply to the Agency. Costs to the Agency are approximately \$727.00 for lodging, mileage, parking, and meals not otherwise provided at the event.

Jo-Ann stated that participation in the convening sounded worthwhile and she was in support of it. Ché agreed and added that this would continue the work of the Agency's Racial Equity Plan and keep the Agency on the cutting edge of what is happening for underrepresented communities.

Marc asked if the host group was a federal agency and Michael explained that it is in fact a national coalition hosting a number of convenings around the country bringing together state agencies, philanthropists, and constituents to talk about how federal funds are accessed.

Jen added that the last-minute nature of the request is because the group is trying to hold the convening before a possible federal government shutdown;

ensuring that representatives from federal agencies can be part of the conversation.

Troy is in favor of Jen and Cathy attending the conference but questions whether the current travel policy must apply to staff travel to a city as close as Providence.

There was no further discussion and Marc asked for a motion to approve the proposed out-of-state travel. Troy moved to approve the request, Ché seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Sherry Dong was absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to acknowledge and consent to the staff-recommended out-of-state travel request subject to the Council's "Out of State Travel Policy" as presented to the October 12, 2023 Meeting.

Marc then asked Michael to brief the Committee on the next agenda item, a potential update to the existing travel policy. Michael explained that staff would like to make the policy a bit more flexible and raised two points: first, attending conferences, convenings, and meetings within New England would not require approval and second, Marc as Acting Chair could be the sole approver of a quick travel request, as opposed to needing the full Council and/or Executive Committee to convene and approve each request.

Dave clarified that travel within New England would be eliminated from the policy if the trips in question did not include airfare or lodging. The memo included the following information and provisions:

Under Mass Cultural Council's Financial Policies, the Executive Committee reviews and consents to out of state travel by Mass Cultural Council staff. Mass Cultural Council's line item in the FY20 Massachusetts State Budget (Chapter 41 of 2019) required the Council adopt provisions requiring pre-approval of out-of-state travel by council staff. The Council adopted and implemented such new policies in August 2019 and delegated, per the Council's enabling act, approval responsibilities to the Executive Committee.

The pandemic started roughly six months after adoption of this policy and travel has been restricted over the past 3 years, meaning that, until recently, the provisions were not required to be used that often. However, as the state continues to emerge from the pandemic, there has been more need for travel recently and we anticipate there will be more (especially short trips within the region). Several of the recent requests have been routine, involving relatively small costs and mileage (i.e., no airfare) and have often come up on short notice. While Committee members have helpfully assembled when asked to approve these items, frequent meetings for routine requests are not a very efficient use of members' time and also not really in keeping with the original

intention of the travel preapproval policies. Although not a huge burden, there are difficulties involved in organizing, holding and obtaining a quorum for Executive Committee meetings- especially on short notice. Therefore, staff is recommending updates to the policy to remove more routine requests from its purview while retaining the policy's intention of ensuring Council member review of out of state travel involving airfare or lodging. We recommend that the provisions of the existing travel preapproval policy be modified so as to:

- Define, for purposes of the policy, "Out of State Travel" to 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 or overnight lodging.
- Treat 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 as not requiring pre-approval of the Executive 2 Committee or Council but rather to be reported to the Executive Committee at the next occurring meeting.
- In the rare case of any out of state travel requests arising at a time when the Chair, after attempts to convene a meeting, determines it is not possible to assemble a quorum to consider a request prior to the date of travel, the Chair may decide on such approval request individually provided that the Council and Committee is informed at the next occurring meeting.

Staff will of course continue to abide by all of the other provisions of the existing travel policy, ensuring that any request for out of state travel submitted for approval, has been internally approved (first by an immediate supervisor and then by Senior Staff) and including finding that will consider:

- o Whether the proposed trip provides a direct benefit to the agency and constituents.
- o Whether the proposed trip aligns with the strategic plan.
- o Whether the staff making the request has been invited to speak/present and/or will receive scholarships/discounts/outside funding to offset the cost of the trip.
- o Whether the total cost of the proposed trip outlined in the travel authorization form is in line with the value the trip would provide.

Please note the Council's Financial Policies exist in several different documents, some of which are out of date and Cathy Cheng-Anderson is looking at updating them all and bringing them together in one document over the course of the next year. In the meantime, we are asking the Executive Committee to adopt the changes suggested above and recommend them to the full Council at the next meeting.

Marc asked if the travel the Committee approved earlier in the meeting would fall under the new policy since it does involve overnight lodging. Dave responded that yes, this travel would have needed approval from the Committee due to the overnight lodging component.

Jo-Ann asked if a conference was within New England but still had a cost associated with it, would the Committee need to approve it. Michael responded that under the new provisions a conference that took place in New England with costs that were not lodging, or airfare would not come to the Committee.

Jo-Ann feels that even if an event is taking place within New England and has no airfare or overnight stay, it should still come to the Committee for approval as a conference can still be expensive even without airfare. Michael let Jo-Ann know that he feels this will mean the Committee will need to convene frequently. Dave suggested that perhaps there should be a cost threshold established, and Marc agreed.

Cathy let the Committee know that she has maintained professional development budgets for many years and feels that the threshold should be \$1200. Jo-Ann felt this number was too high and suggested \$500.

Michael let the Committee know that the full Council approves the travel budget each year as part of the spending plan and that these approvals are an extra step in the process. Jo-Ann let Michael know that she was under the impression that a travel budget was not part of the spending plan.

Cathy shared that while there was no specified "travel budget" item in the spending plan, the plan shared at the August Council Meeting staff included in the aggregate \$51,000 for in-state travel, out-of-state travel, training reimbursements, and job-related expenses. She noted that this is less than 1% of the annual budget and thus far in FY24 staff has spent \$7K.

Jo-Ann feels that regardless of the full amount allocated each year, the Committee should approve travel expenses over \$500 and asked if staff had gathered examples of policies from other state agencies. They had not, so Dave reiterated the reason why the current policy existed.

Troy suggested setting a cost threshold a bit higher; he also stated that the important piece is that the public understands that it is in the benefit of the Agency to participate in industry conferences and events.

Ché also feels that \$500 is perhaps too low, but that the Committee should perform its due diligence if the cost is higher.

Marc asked for examples of how expensive potential conferences might be and

suggested looking at those costs might help the Committee determine an appropriate cost threshold. He also asked if today's travel expense that was presented for approval would have not been considered since the cost is under \$1200. Dave responded that the Providence conference was considered because of the overnight lodging expense associated with it; Cathy added that conferences rarely have registration fees higher than \$1200. Dave clarified that only conferences with lodging would come before the Committee under the revised policy.

Jo-Ann reiterated that \$1200 is high and Marc agreed and suggested the limit be \$1000. Cathy suggested \$800 as a threshold to address Jo-Ann's concerns. Jo-Ann felt \$800 was appropriate and that if the Committee was still convening frequently, the policy could be revisited. Jo-Ann would like to see the revised policy; Dave will share the revised memo with the revision with the Committee.

Marc asked for a motion to approve the amended policy. Troy moved to approve the policy; Jo-Ann seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Sherry Dong was absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to adopt and recommend to the full Council the modifications to the Out of State Travel Approval Policy as presented to the October 12, 2023 Meeting consisting of the following provisions:

- The modified policy shall define, for purposes of the policy, "Out of State Travel" to not include expenses related to travel from Massachusetts to the other New England states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut) unless expenses include
 - any airfare or overnight lodging or
 - registration/attendance fees exceeding \$800 in the aggregate for all attendees.
- 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 shall not requiring pre-approval of the Executive Committee or Council but rather to be reported to the Executive Committee at the next occurring meeting.
- In the rare case of any out of state travel requests arising at a time when the Chair, after attempts to convene a meeting, determines it is not possible to assemble a quorum to consider a request prior to the date of travel, the Chair may decide on such approval request individually provided that the Council and Committee is informed at the next occurring meeting.

Marc moved to the final agenda item: the upcoming Council Meeting currently scheduled for November 1st. He noted that the Council would be looking at a very light agenda and asked Michael to say more about this.

Michael shared that the only agenda item for November would be an approval of the minutes from the August Council Meeting. As such, he is suggesting the meeting be canceled. Staff will still plan to send reports to the Council on their work. There are also sector-wide convenings scheduled for October 23rd in Springfield and November 6th in Boston, providing two opportunities this fall for the Council to gather.

Marc asked if any Committee Members objected to cancelling the November Council Meeting. There were no objections. The meeting will be cancelled.

The end of the meeting agenda had been reached at this point and Marc, as Acting Chair, adjourned the meeting at 10:41am.