



Power of culture

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL GRANTS COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Jo-Ann Davis, Chair of the Grants Committee
Nina Fialkow, Chair, Mass Cultural Council
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair, Mass Cultural Council
Che Anderson
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Karen Hurvitz

Staff Members and Guests Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Special Assistant to the Executive Director & Leadership Team
Charles Baldwin, Program Officer
Kelly Bennett, Program Officer
Dan Blask, Program Officer
Luis Cotto, Program Manager
Diane Daily, Program Officer
Sara Glidden, Program Manager
Erik Holmgren, Program Manager
Maggie Holtzberg, Program Officer
Evelyn Nellum, Program Manager
Carmen Plazas, Communications Manager
Lisa Simmons, Program Manager

Prepared on 8/12/21

Chair Jo-Ann Davis called the meeting to order at 10:02am. Deputy Director David Slatery reminded all present of the Open Meeting Law but dispensed with reading it since no members of the public were in attendance.

Jo-Ann then asked Committee Members to approve the minutes of their last two business meetings held on May 4 and May 11, 2021. Karen Barry moved to approve the minutes and Barbara Schaffer Bacon seconded the motion. All were in favor and it was

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee approves the minutes of the May 4 and 11, 2021 Grants Committee Meetings in the form presented to the Grants Committee at its June 15, 2021 Meeting.

Karen Barry asked if staff could make minutes available to Committee members sooner moving forward. David Slatery let Karen know that staff is required to post a draft of the minutes within 30 days of each meeting. Moving forward Committee members will be notified when that draft is available, so they do not need to wait for their next meeting materials to review them.

Jo-Ann began by welcoming the newest member of the Committee, Che Anderson. She then expressed how honored she feels to have been asked to Chair the Grants Committee, this being her first meeting as Chair. She is eager to enter the post-pandemic era with her fellow Committee Members, work to improve the Agency's grants process, and continue the great work already being done. Jo-Ann explained that the purpose of today's meeting is to prepare for the August Grants Committee and full Council meetings. Today's meeting will give Committee Members the opportunity to have a preview of the work and recommendations the team will make around the grants process.

Executive Director Michael Bobbitt thanked Jo-Ann and said it was wonderful to have her as the new Committee Chair. Michael reiterated the purpose and intention of the meeting stating that this would be a high-level presentation and discussion of what staff is thinking about consolidation, sunseting, and evaluation of programs. Michael reminded Committee Members that staff had undertaken a program evaluation process. They are now putting numbers to ideas. Michael has asked staff to look at how to cut back on programs as the Agency is massively over-programmed. As staff has evaluated their programs, they've been asked to take into account impact, quality, and work/life balance, with a strong desire to have racial equity as part of the process and lastly, to consider Covid relief funds.

Jo-Ann then asked Operations Director Jen Lawless for her report.

Jen shared a PowerPoint presentation for reference (available upon request). Jen began by reminding Committee Members that they'd previously received data about the Agency's FY21 grant-making. She will walk them through this data, then they will hear brief presentations from program staff, and questions would be taken at the end.

The first step staff took in preparing new recommendations was to look at FY21 funding and compare it with other state arts agencies around the country. Mass Cultural Council is first in the nation in terms of number of grants made, and community reach is the broadest in the country. This is based on the past 15 years of data.

Barbara Shaffer Bacon asked if this included Local Cultural Council numbers. The data does include Local Cultural Council numbers.

Next, staff looked at grantmaking by county and then by program. Michael highlighted the number of applicants versus the number of grants with regards to the Artists fellowship program, highlighting the enormous demand for those grants. Staff did a geographic analysis of applications looking specifically at what impact the pandemic had, if applications coming from all over the state or are some areas under-represented, and where should FY22 outreach be targeted. Jen then showed Committee members the change in applications by program from FY20 to FY21, and the decrease in applications from all counties that occurred between FY20 and FY21.

Karen Barry thanked Jen for looking at things by county noting that Worcester is the second largest county and that there is a huge opportunity there for outreach as well as in Plymouth County. Karen feels dissecting the data this way is very helpful and thanked Jen again for her efforts.

Jen stated that there are six counties to focus FY22 outreach on, meaning they had application demand lower than both the % population and % nonprofits. These same six counties were a priority for outreach in FY21. They are: Essex, Norfolk, Worcester, Bristol, Hampden, and Plymouth counties.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked how the graphs Jen was presenting would change if applications for Artist grants were separated out. Might we have a lot of artists in Hampshire County, but fewer organizations? Jen agreed that looking at individuals versus organizations would be helpful.

Jen then presented a brief Grant Analysis which looked at how successful applicants from each county were and asked if there was part of the Agency's current review process that disadvantages certain areas. Staff looked at grant applications compared to approvals by county, and this showed that once an application is in, success rates are almost identical. Where the Agency can influence this is to get more applications from communities in which we want to see more grantmaking; this highlights the importance of outreach.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon expressed that she can't figure out how Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP) grants that have renewing funding affect these numbers as they are consistent, they aren't competing and winning. Jen responded that those numbers will always present as 100% need met, but Project grants show unmet demand as do Gateway grants. It isn't possible at this point to see application numbers for the Portfolio increase.

Michael stated that in the coming year the CIP team would look at that funding formula, work to remove inequities that exist, and develop a new process. Barbara remarked that the whole program is predicated on our desire to support groups that we identify as our cultural assets and it's important to try and imagine different groups that should be getting our support. Karen Barry gave South Shore Conservatory as an example of an organization that is well-funded, part of CIP, and that has teaching artists going out into the community. Jen agreed that South Shore Conservatory is a good example because of the programming they offer to Brockton Public Schools; in final reports organizations are asked if they presented programming at any additional

locations. It is not a perfect system, but it gives a better view of impact. There is a map on the Agency's blog that shows direct and indirect funding.

There being no further questions, Jo-Ann moved to the next item on the agenda: grant program presentations by staff. A PowerPoint presentation that was referenced during staff presentations is available upon request.

Dan Blask presented for the **Artists** team stating that the goal is to double the number of artists awarded grants in FY22. Staff is looking at using different tiers of grants, instead of \$15K and \$1500 there could be multiple possibilities. Staff wants to build on the success of the Covid relief fund and continue the connections they've made to a new community of individuals. Maggie Holtzberg added that the Folk Arts & Heritage program would move to one-year grants instead of two-year grants. FY22 marked the second year of the most recent round, a new round using the one-year model will begin in FY23.

Michael noted that even if the team doubled the number of grants, they still aren't meeting the demand.

Sara Glidden presented for the **Cultural Investment Portfolio**, outlining the three programs that fall under its umbrella: Portfolio, Gateway, and Projects. Proposed changes for the Portfolio include flexibility in formula calculations to account for Covid impact and a suspension of the site visit requirement. For Gateway, staff is proposing that the application cycle previously planned for FY22 be suspended and to fund the current cohort for a third year. And for Projects staff proposes a simplification of the application in FY22, a continuation of funding for public programming and capacity building projects, and a postponement of the application to September 2021.

Erik Holmgren presented on behalf of **Creative Youth Development**. In the coming year staff proposes merging YouthReach and SerHacer into one program called YouthReach that will continue to support ensemble music programs. Erik noted that typically YouthReach is a three-year program. FY21 was slated to be the end of the latest cycle, but funding was extended one year due to the pandemic. In FY22 the Agency will accept new applications. The Amplify program will continue to be paused, this will allow for more time and focus on the BIPOC Youth Alumni Council. Social Prescription will see only a few small adjustments: the cohort of 12 organizations will be maintained, continued financial support and training will be offered, and staff will analyze data collected over the course of FY22.

Diane Daily presented the Agency's **Education** programs proposing that the STARS program will run as usual with two changes: the application will be open for four weeks, the per session rate will be increased. Big Yellow School Bus will remain paused as schools recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Charles Baldwin then stated that the **Universal Participation Initiative (UP)** would not see many changes in FY22. The program will stay the course so there can be time for stewardship and development of programs. Innovation Fund (\$3K grants) will continue to seed new approaches to access. The LEAD stipend will resume, and the stipend for the Innovation and Learning Network would remain at \$3K.

Lisa Simmons spoke on behalf of the **Community Initiative**. She began by reviewing the basics of the Local Cultural Council program, Festivals program, and Cultural Districts

Initiative. There will be no major changes to the LCC program proposed for FY22. Staff will be training 329 cities and towns on the new grants management system. The LCC grant cycle opens on September 1. Staff is proposing an increase for Festivals grants and, looking ahead to FY23, may propose changing the program so that instead of two cycles per year, there is one. There will be no major changes proposed to the Cultural Districts Initiative in FY22.

Jen concluded by summarizing the Agency's **Partnership** grants to the Network for Arts Administrators of Color, the Massachusetts Historical Society for Mass History Day, Media Partnerships, New England Foundation for the Arts, Mass Humanities, and the Cultural Equity Learning Community (CELC)/Arts Connect International.

Michael stated that his dream is to move CultureRx and the Agency's racial equity work into one department and to scale up the work with CELC; he hopes to get every organization trained to do racial equity work. Staff has built a calendar for the entire upcoming year and taken a look at how many events and convenings they plan to offer; this has helped identify bottlenecks and free up time. With the new grants management system, we will have the ability to look at the granting process to make sure it's equitable – how we select panelists, who we fund, the new system will make this process far easier on staff and grantees.

Karen Hurvitz asked Lisa Simmons if moving the Festivals program from a bi-annual to an annual cycle would decrease opportunity for festival organizers to apply. Lisa responded that she believes moving to an annual grant cycle will be beneficial for festival organizers and streamline things for them. She receives questions and feedback about this frequently, most people would prefer an annual grant cycle. Karen added that she applauds the idea of increasing Festival grant amounts and suggests that that they be increased to \$1500 having run festivals herself. Karen mentioned that universally, festivals have been greatly underfunded and underappreciated in the huge role they play not only in enriching the communities in which they are held, but also in promoting the artists whose works are shown in that individual artists get exposure at little or no expense (compared to other options) and promote socialization and networking among artists which can be helpful both for creative and economic reasons and help expose festival-goers to art (which may not have been their reason for attending the festival). Karen further mentioned that these considerations apply not only to visual artists, but to performing artists and musicians as well. Karen further noted she had organized and attended festivals of all sorts and they are magical in that they allow people to mix it up in a relaxed atmosphere where everyone is generally open to experiencing whatever is presented. They promote conversations with strangers and are truly a marketplace of ideas.

Chair Nina Fialkow added that Festivals are wonderful community builders and asked how Lisa would determine the increased grant amount. Lisa explained that staff would rely on information included in final reports. They've also partnered with ArtsBoston to do an audience development program and create a toolkit so that the final reports will capture exactly the information needed.

Jo-Ann asked Sara Glidden how many grantees in CIP's Gateway program make it into the Portfolio. Sara responded that the first time organizations were eligible to make this transition, 12 of them were successful in doing so. Last year, the second time organizations were eligible, eight organizations moved into the Portfolio. Eligibility is

determined by being successful in two out of three applications. At this point there have only been three cycles. Sara noted that staff has received a good number of Gateway applications from organizations that are new to the Agency. Jo-Ann asked if site visits would resume. Sara stated that she hoped so and that site visits in general were going to be discussed by the staff soon.

Karen Barry thanked staff for their thoughtful presentations and stated that she is also in favor of increasing the amount of Festival grants. She loves the UP Initiative, and thinks that when we talk about working in the social justice space, while she loves seeing a focus on special accommodations, she'd like there to be a lens to look at the socioeconomic piece of the conversation as well; to look at the data of the Commonwealth with the third largest population being Haitian, the large Portuguese population, and Asian population. When we look at communities by county, that is reflective of the socioeconomic need, and she sees huge opportunities. Finally, Karen noted that at the Committee's last meeting they discussed the ongoing state audit, and that as staff is looking at operational changes in terms of reporting for the year ahead, they might check with the Inspector General to see if the way they are collecting data is compliant.

David stated that the auditors have spent a long time looking at recent grants and taken an open view. They are spending an hour with each person involved with the Artists relief fund and staff has clearly expressed that if the Agency is doing something incorrectly, we are open to all suggestions. This has been a very transparent process. David added that the Agency was also subject recently to an audit by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and staff is working through a corrective plan with them. David noted that the Agency plans to hire a new staff member in FY22 who will focus on fiscal compliance.

Jo-Ann then asked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for a high-level update on the ongoing budget process.

Bethann stated that when the House did its budget debate in March the Agency's ask was \$20M. The House Ways & Means Committee gave it to us and added earmarks so the final number was \$21,375,000. The Senate followed in May with the Senate Ways & Means Committee recommending an allocation of \$20M. Given the difference in numbers, this means the Agency's line item is subject to Conference Committee. The Conference Committee was appointed last week and has been negotiating the final budget to send to the House and Senate and then to the Governor. Last week Bethann submitted testimony to the conferees. This was a message of thanks, we do not need a big advocacy push, we are right where we want to be. When the budget gets enacted, that is when we will ask MassCreative to launch their advocacy so we can encourage the Governor to sign the budget into law.

Karen Barry asked if it was naïve to think the Agency might be able to get a little of the \$4B surplus or \$6B from the federal government.

Bethann does not think this is naïve and is, in fact, part of the Agency's ongoing advocacy campaign which will pick back up after the FY22 budget has been finalized. Bethann added that yesterday the Administration unveiled the capital spending plan. Traditionally, the Agency is included in the capital plan for the Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF). Bethann is happy to share that this support will continue; \$10M has been allocated for CFF. Michael, Nina, and Vice Chair Marc Carroll did make a pitch to the

Governor in March for \$24M in the capital plan, but this was not incorporated. However, as Karen noted, there are billions of dollars to be distributed and everyone staff has spoken with in the legislature has been supportive and bullish about making sure those funds come through for the cultural sector.

Barbara Shaffer Bacon asked if the robust trainings and technical assistance offered by staff in FY21 would continue in FY22 and Michael responded that trainings and technical assistance would continue but be pared down to make room for racial equity work. Jo-Ann thanked the staff for all of their work over the past year and stated that she continues to be in awe of the Agency's leadership team. As Chair, Jo-Ann adjourned the meeting at 11:18am.