

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

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2020

ON-LINE MEETING

Chair Victoria Marsh called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM

Committee Members Present

Victoria Marsh, Chair of Grants Committee (by phone)
Nina Fialkow, Chair of Mass Cultural Council
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair, Mass Cultural Council (by phone)
Karen Barry
Kathy Castro
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Hurvitz

Staff members present were

Anita Walker, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Bethann Steiner, Communications Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Sara Glidden, CIP Program Manager
Michael Ibrahim, CIP Program Manager
Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Program Officer

Victoria Marsh opened the meeting by noting the Open Meeting Law Statement that had been circulated. Victoria stated that four new

programs or program modifications has been proposed and that the plan was for the Committee to consider them one by one. Each program would receive a first a staff presentation, then questions from Committee members and then responses to the questions. She then called on Anita Walker to begin the presentations.

Anita first gave the background conditions that led the Council to propose today's programs. First staff collected data from surveys from field in the immediate aftermath of the stay-at-home orders noting over 500 responses from organizations and another 500 from individuals. Staff also spoke with cultural leaders to learn of the impact. The Boch Center has laid off half of its staff and all people scheduled to work on 70 different performances which have been cancelled. Jacob's Pillow cancelled its summer program for the first time ever. Anita emphasized that these programs to be presented to today were directly informed by research and discussions with organizations and individuals. The governing principles were speed and simplicity (no red tape) with the aim of getting cash out the door quickly. Organizations surveyed had immediate losses due to cancellations. We focused on collaboration and were able to get contributions from our regional arts organization, New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) (more to be said later). Thanks to a skilled and experienced staff, we were able to put some proposals together quickly and bring them to the Committee today. She introduced Sara Glidden Program Manager and supervisor of the CIP team to discuss the Safe Harbors, Soft Landings program.

Sara referred to the written materials circulated to the Committee and explained the general framework of the program which was a 3-element package of responses to the field. While the Council does not have enough money to address their losses, it does have resources to provide information and hands-on support for the organizations.

1. Hire Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF) to conduct a general information webinar series available to all organizations focused to a great degree on accessing federal relief resources
2. Individual coaching from NFF to particularly needy organizations or cohorts (such as the Capacity Accelerator Network previously approved by the Council)
3. Supplemental financial awards of \$2250 to the current CIP and Gateway program grantees (335 separate organizations)

Michael Ibrahim then explained that the educational component of the program would consist of 15 different webinars over the next 2 weeks with NFF. Focusing on federal programs, there has been great interest in these presentations and we would expect several hundred participants at each one. If approved, the webinars will start this Friday as time is of the essence.

Anita noted this was intended as a massive technical assistance program to organizations and the information imparted would be very impactful as this time. She also noted that a flat grant to each organization would provide some help as well. This program was funded by redirecting 85% of the funds from the gaming funds for "organizational support" for the CultureRx Social Prescription Pilot (and which the Committee had reviewed on March 3). We kept the Pilot funded at \$120,000 to reflect the work that had already occurred and to slow it down but keep it alive for the other end of this crisis where it will be needed.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Victoria both spoke in support of the Safe Harbors program.

Next Victoria asked Anita to address the COVID-19 Relief Fund for Individuals. Anita referred to the written materials and once again indicated this program had been informed by our research survey and we were focused on getting the funds out quickly. It provides a small grant of \$1000 but large enough to get affected artists to spend the time applying for it. There is a low documentation requirement initially although the applicants are made aware that we can request further backup documentation. It is proposed to be distributed on a marketplace basis- grants will be distributed proportionately based upon demand by region (We used the 6 regions from the Cultural Facilities Fund program as those are established and have been in use for more than a decade). Applications will be randomized so there will be no "first come first serve" bias toward people with resources and time to apply faster. Anita then asked Jen Lawless to speak further to the program.

Jen indicated the main driver of the program was our survey. In the first wave of closures and cancellations, artists reported an average income loss of 9 gigs or around \$4000. We will try to expedite the payments to grantees under this program but we have to deal with the reality of the state system. We have attempted to simplify the process as much as possible.

Bethann Steiner reported that the Council had a multilayered approach to reaching the field. We will send e-newsletters to our 25,000 person mailing lists, publicize the opportunity on our ArtSake blog reaching 8000 and also send out through CYD news and our webpages and social media pages upon which we have a robust presence (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn etc.) We also have partnerships with other organizations who can publicize plus relationships with regular media, the LCC network and 200 state legislators who are generally eager to share news of funding opportunities with their constituents.

Barbara then was recognized and she indicated that she appreciated the presentation and the program, she felt that we should ensure geographic representation by guaranteeing 50 grants in each region and suggested that grants be \$500 so we could reach twice as many artists. She feared those artists not familiar with Mass Cultural Council might miss the opportunity. She also noted that Greater Boston had a number of other resources.

Victoria recognized Anita. Anita stated we had had lots of discussion around this issue and we really put a lot of stock in ability to communicate to artists. We felt \$1000 made sense for the level of effort needed (reporting on lost income) from the applicant. We really need to focus on getting the word out and we will rely on LCCs.

Jen mentioned that LCCs have given us their direct grant data and notes that looking population and application data tends to correlate (not perfectly). By relying on application rates from regions, we will not be out of whack.

Karen Barry remarked that the amount of work was impressive but liked Barbara's idea about minimum amounts for regions. Barbara stated that dedicated \$25,000 to each of the six regions would still leave an extra \$75,000 to spread around the state according to demand.

Jen reminded the members that the awards are being made on a randomized basis and Anita mentioned that our survey data came in from all over the state. We paid "hyper-attention to getting the word out"

Victoria asked if staff could look at application data as it comes in and report back. Jen indicated that we could look at the applications that

had come in halfway through the grant application process and report that to the Committee and redouble outreach efforts if necessary, in areas where applications may be lagging. Committee members or Council members generally could help get the word out.

Kathy Castro noted that the LCCs have a strong network and they can help in reaching applicants and would look forward to knowing before the deadline before the application deadline to see if the LCCs.

Victoria then asked Anita if she would talk about the Gaming Mitigation Program. Anita mentioned that due to current emergency, we had proposed adding gaming funds (the 75% dedicated to gaming mitigation) collected in January and February and get them out to the field. Also, in terms of timing, we are asking one-time authority due to the emergency for staff to determine the maximums and minimums for the grants without the need to come back to the Council or another vote as this would enable us to announce and get the funds out much more quickly. Karen Barry asked when will the Council be notified of the grants and was pointed to the memo circulated to the Committee stating that the Council would be notified by email of the final grant list prior to the grantees receiving notification.

Victoria then asked Anita to address the Social Prescription Pilot. Anita indicated that the Grants Committee had looked at this program back on March 3 (before the world changed due to COVID-19) and this program was going to be funded with the ¼ of gaming revenues dedicated to “organizational support.” As we stated earlier- we are now proposing that 85% of those funds be used for the Safe Harbors program described earlier but that we retain \$120,000 for the Social Prescription Pilot.

Barbara was concerned that so far none of the COVID-19 relief efforts specifically addressed diversity and equity issues and suggested maybe these funds could be held back on focused on that effort.

Anita responded that diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) were at the core of all of the Council's programs and that was not going to stop just because of COVID-19. She noted that the CultureRx initiative was a DEI program which addressed social isolation which now looms as a larger problem due to the social distancing practices resulting from the current coronavirus emergency as well as anxiety due to unemployment. She

asked Erik Holmgren, Program Manager to speak further about the Social Prescription Pilot.

Erik responded that despite the current emergency, the field is focused and partner healthcare organizations are focused on this idea and hopes that we can keep the effort alive during the current crisis. He noted that this program was at the beginning of something and has been amazed at the response and the work that has gone into it so far and believed it would be needed on the other side.

Anita mentioned a recent conversation with Diane Paulus of the A.R.T.- their new strategic plan is focused around the Harvard medical school and they are embarking on a plan to build a new theater within a health center.

Bethann commented as to the enthusiasm of the legislature last month.

Victoria thanked Barbara for her input and noted that we should always pay attention to DEI issues in our oversight. She then recognized Karen Barry.

Karen stated her belief that we needed to be realistic about budget issues and we should look at the portfolio and how we will deal with it under these changed budgetary outlooks. She mentioned she wanted to look at how new revenue would be spent in the future.

Victoria stated we had to see what the "new normal" would and mentioned that next Grants committee was intended to take a deep dive and look at the programs closely.

Karen Hurvitz noted the Committee should take a close look at the Gaming Mitigation money and pay careful attention as to who it is going to.

Victoria thanked Karen and summed up that in these strange unprecedented times we will have to look at many things.

Kathy Castro indicated she would like to have another meeting on the grants. Victoria indicated the next Grants Committee meeting would look at these things.

Victoria then called for a vote, amended as discussed with respect to COVID-19 Relief Fund for Individuals. Upon motion duly made and

seconded, it was unanimously held by roll call vote (and noting that members Sandy Dunn, Jo-Ann Davis, Lillian Do and Jake Brennan were absent)

WHEREAS, the Council approved a FY20 Spending Plan for the Council's operations which contained approval of several different grant and service programs and related activities; and

WHEREAS, due the COVID-19 crisis, staff has proposed to amend said approval to reallocate \$225,000 of the funds approved as part of said Spending Plan toward funding a newly-designed COVID-19 Relief Fund for Artists and Cultural Educators as described in memoranda presented to the Executive Committee at its March 31, 2020 meeting; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 23K of the Massachusetts General Laws, as most recently amended by sections 3 and 4 of Chapter 142 of the Acts of 2019, provides that Mass Cultural Council will receive 2% of the Commonwealth's gross gaming tax revenue from casinos into the Massachusetts Cultural and Performing Arts Mitigation Trust Fund (the "Fund") to be managed by Mass Cultural Council; and

WHEREAS, staff of Mass Cultural Council had presented a plan (the "Plan") for usage of Fund revenues by memoranda to the Council on January 28, 2020 which Plan was reviewed and approved by the Council; and

WHEREAS, due the COVID-19 crisis, staff has proposed to amend said Plan to make use of all of the monies currently in the Fund so as to increase the amount of funds available to the Gaming Mitigation Program in 2020, deploy the resources of the Fund on a more accelerated basis to, among other things, fund a COVID-19 Emergency Initiative for Cultural Organizations to be called "Safe Harbors and Soft Landings" in the amount \$990,000 and also to allocate \$120,000 to the CultureRx Social Prescription Pilot; and

WHEREAS, staff has presented the details of the new COVID-19 response programs discussed above to the Grants Committee for their review and recommendation to the Council for approval;

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee recommends that the Council approve the two new COVID-19 response programs and the amendment and reduction in size of the CultureRx Social Prescription Pilot and the modifications to the Gaming Mitigation Program as described in memoranda presented to and reviewed by the Grants Committee at its March 31, 2020 meeting provided that with respect to COVID-19 Relief Fund for Artists and Cultural Educators, Council staff shall review on April 15 (during the midpoint of the April 8-22 period for soliciting applications) regional distribution of applications and do additional outreach to underrepresented regions if necessary including contacting Council members in such underrepresented regions to assist in increasing applications.

Barbara noted for the record that she wished we had the opportunity to vote on the programs singly as she would not have voted to approve each one.

The stated end time for the meeting having been reached, Victoria announced that other matters would be addressed at the next Grants Committee (currently scheduled for May 5) as Chair adjourned the meeting.