

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2020

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Chair Victoria Marsh called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM

Committee Members Present were
Victoria Marsh, Chair, Grants Committee
Nina Fialkow, Chair, Mass Cultural Council
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair, Mass Cultural Council
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Kathy Castro
Jo-Ann Davis
Sandra Dunn
Karen Hurvitz
Cecil Barron Jensen

Staff Members Present were
Anita Walker, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Bethann Steiner, Communications Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Kelly Bennett
Dan Blask
Luis Cotto
Ricardo Guillame

Prepared on 7/10/20

Maggie Holtzberg
Scott Hufford
Mina Kim
Kalyn King
Evelyn Nellum
Ann Petruccelli
Timothea Pham

Victoria Marsh opened the meeting by referring to the Open Meeting Law Statement since no guests were present.

She then asked for a moment of silence for George Floyd.

After the moment of silence, Victoria explained that the meeting had been designed to provide the Committee with plenty of time for discussion. She then asked that the minutes from the previous two Committee meeting be approved. Upon motion duly made and seconded and after a roll call vote noting that Jake Brennan and Lillian Do were absent, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee approves the minutes of the March 3, 2020 and March 31, 2020 Grants Committee Meetings in the form presented to the Grants Committee at its June 2, 2020 Meeting.

Victoria moved onto the next agenda item: approval of recommended Artist Fellowship Program grants in Choreography, Fiction/Creative Nonfiction, and Painting. Victoria asked if any Committee members had questions. No hands were raised. Upon motion duly made and seconded and after a roll call vote noting that Jake Brennan and Lillian Do were absent, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the FY20 Artist Fellowship grant awards in the disciplines of Choreography, Fiction/Creative Nonfiction and Painting as reviewed by the Grants Committee at its June 2, 2020 meeting.

Victoria then moved into the FY21 planning discussion. Victoria explained that staff would make presentations in three program areas today. Committee members were asked to hold questions until the end of each presentation and to use the "raise hand" function in Zoom.

Anita Walker explained that these presentations and those at next week's Grants Committee Meeting are new elements in the budget and grantmaking process and that these presentations were added at the request of the Council. Anita explained that today's meeting is a discussion and an opportunity to learn more about the existing grant programs, not a time to make decisions. Anita reminded the Committee that after today's meeting they'd see a good deal of items listed as "TBD" since the budget for FY21 is unknown. She also reminded the Committee that this discussion was for planning purposes right now and that the content for the June 18th meeting would be akin to a typical "May" meeting and would not have budget votes or decisions. In reference to the current Covid-19 crisis and resulting state budget delays, She recommended the Committee read Bethann Steiner's [recent blog](#) post to learn more about this year's delayed budget process.

Anita cued up the presentations and discussion with a "350 thousand-foot" overview: Currently, due to Covid-19 organizations are out flat. Working artists haven't worked. This is not a typical year. The agency sees FY21 as a year to rebuild, renew, and recover. Anita stated that there will be little if any travel and no events, things like that are easy to remove from our plans for next year in this Covid environment. We are looking at how our programs can be in service of rebuilding, renewal, and recovery. Anita went on to say that Jen Lawless has put together a good deal of information to show how we are distributing funds across Commonwealth.

Jen Lawless presented information regarding state arts agencies showing that Mass Cultural Council is 9th in the nation in FY19 in terms of grantmaking, second in number of grants, and reached more communities and served more grantees than any other state. We are squarely ahead of New York! Jen clarified the number of towns figure: there are more zip codes than towns in Massachusetts, and we are grantmaking in 70% of them. New York is only grantmaking in only 13% of their zip codes. Mass Cultural Council is "small but mighty" in terms of reach. That has been part of a trend over time. In FY07 we had only 844 grantees and in FY20 that number was over 2,000. Jen let Committee members know that her materials included a breakdown by program as well. The documents were created a week ago, so they do not yet include the Artist grants the Committee discussed earlier in the meeting.

Anita added that the agency had rolled out several grant programs during the time the staff has been working remotely due to the pandemic. Five of those programs were brand new.

Jen further explained that the data is also broken down by county and went on to describe how the data is analyzed. The agency starts with application analysis. Are applications coming from all over state? Are some areas over or under-represented? Where should we target outreach for new applications? The team also looked at basic things like population and application demand by county compared to total population and number of non-profits. When the number of applications is far less than population and nonprofit numbers, that is a place we can do outreach. Then they looked at grant analysis, what are rates of approval? This was examined by county: we don't want to see a city or town be 10% of the applicant pool and 30% of the grantee pool. The goal is similarity between % of applications and % of grants. Overall, the numbers are well-aligned.

Jo-Ann Davis congratulated Jen on her outstanding work on grant analysis.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked how the agency was counting Local Cultural Councils. Jen explained that we are counting the 329 grants we make, not the grants made by the LCCs. Barbara asked if Jen did the same analysis by program. Jen said she had not. Barbara asked to follow-up with Jen offline to take a closer look at Hampshire county.

Jen introduced Program Staff Presentations.

Dan Blask from the Artists team began. Artist Fellowships are direct grants to individual artists, anonymously (except with traditional arts) based on excellence and creative ability based on recent work. The department gives grants in 12 artistic disciplines, and panelists review six per year. Reviews are done anonymously by panelists the agency invites -usually working artists and experts in their field. The grants the Committee ratified today were the second round of awards for FY20. The grants given are \$15K for Fellows and \$1500 for Finalists.

Maggie Holtzberg then walked the Committee through the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship program. Apprenticeships are awarded every other year. The most recent panel was held in late March. This was the first remote panel the program has had. Apprenticeships will next year be

presented as two-year grants. Maggie summarized that the program is essentially one where a master artist works one-on-one mentoring an apprentice in a traditional artform.

Jen asked if the Committee had any questions. No hands were raised. Jen introduced Lisa Simmons from the Community Initiative.

Lisa introduced her team members present today. Then described each element of the Initiative: Festivals, Local Cultural Councils, and the Cultural Districts Initiative. Lisa also gave a brief overview of the LCC grantmaking process.

Jen asks if the Committee has any questions for Lisa. No hands are raised.

Diane Daily introduced the agency's Education programs all of which are designed to bring arts to students and young people. Diane described STARS Residencies, which brings students and teachers together in the classroom with residencies of three days or more; and Big Yellow School Bus, a transportation program to bring K-12 students on field trips to cultural organizations. Diane also briefly explained Poetry Out Loud, Mass History Day, and Creative Minds Out of School

Karen Barry asked what the Klarman Family Foundation funds as she recalls from previous meetings are for? If we still have money for the program funded by Klarman? And how is the STARS funding distributed?

Jen explained that the Klarman Funds specifically funds the Music Educator/Teaching Artist program which the Foundation specifically contracted with the Council for.

Diane explained that STARS applications are awarded based upon when received- they are timestamped when they come in. Applications that are ineligible are removed. Only one application per school is permitted. Then the applications are reviewed against program criteria, and awards are made on a rolling basis.

Victoria aseds that the Committee take a five-minute break and afterwards Anita will frame the strategy for discussion of the three program areas that were just outlined by staff.

When the meeting resumed **Anita** cued up the discussion about the three previously outlined programs. She says staff is eager to hear the

Committee's thoughts on how we want to think about our investments in the coming year. Particularly interested in the idea of a relief fund, is there a way to pivot next year and contribute to recovery. Anita reminded the Committee that this isn't a time to make decisions, it's a time for discussion and investigation of ideas.

Victoria asked the Committee members to go one at a time and to use the hand raising function in Zoom.

Barbara asked if it would be possible to talk about FY20 reallocation.

Victoria clarified that this discussion was fully focused on FY21.

Kathy Castro expressed her concern that the agency won't receive the same allocation as FY20 and that if a relief fund is established and the agency ends up working with less money in FY21, cuts to other programs would need to be made.

Anita clarified that what the staff was hoping to glean from today's discussion was an idea of what Committee Members' priorities were, not to present a final plan or strategy. Given that the agency does not know what its budget will be for FY21, right now the staff is hoping to hear what the Members believe should be a priority once a budget is known.

Kathy understood and said that she feels it's imperative that the agency not conduct business as usual, and that a relief fund would be most appropriate.

Victoria expressed that she appreciated the "rebuild, renew, recover" framework Anita had mentioned earlier in the meeting, and noted that everything would be rethought through that lens.

Sandy Dunn asked that the agency also think about the fact that we have a lot of programs and that maybe we should not create a new fund, but rather look at the programs we have now and adjust their criteria

Jen agreed. This is a shift of perspective and noted that the agency did create a Covid-19 relief fund with money from across agency in recent months. The question is, is it a one-time occurrence or do we continue to do this

Cecil noting that she'd attended a number of the Community Initiative's listening sessions, said that many organizations have proven to be resilient and are tackling the challenges created by Covid-19 in innovative ways. There is an opportunity to celebrate and support that work. Cecil continued that she feels the pandemic is not going away in six months, she believes it will be with us for a while and the agency will need to be responsive to that.

Karen Barry asked if gig workers were able to apply for CARES Act funding and David responded that they were not. Barbara added that CARES Act funding was geared more towards organizations, unemployment was there to help workers. Karen continued that she hoped gig workers could be part of the conversation moving forward and that she agreed with what Sandy had previously said.

Barbara expressed confusion over what is meant by the rebuild, recover, renew framework and how we would know what organizations and artists need.

Anita let the Committee know the agency was currently circulating a survey to find out the answers to that question, with a deadline of June 30th. The survey is required of CIP organizations, but open to all and is the third of its kind the agency has conducted in recent months.

Victoria asked Anita to inform the Committee of the confusion around cultural organizations reopening in Massachusetts.

Anita explained that the agency had heard from a number of organizations who had far more questions than answers, and noted that unfortunately the Council wasn't included in the Governor's reopening task force.

Victoria asked if, when it comes to a relief fund, does the agency open funds only to the current pool or strive to bring in new applicants. Jen explained that recently close to 1900 applications had been submitted for 300 grants, leaving 1600 people declined for funding, so at this point, grants were very limited.

Barbara asked if the agency was collecting demographic information and if applicants had to qualify in terms of need. Jen explained that only geographical location and discipline were collected. Barbara

commented that the need is everywhere, and if it doesn't show that we are reaching areas that are under-resourced we should go back out.

Sandy suggested that the agency figure out a way to help artists become self-sufficient, such as establishing a virtual gallery or a listing of gig workers available for hire, and Anita mentioned the Agency's previous experience with Matchbook. Sandy continued that it would be great to create a business platform for artists who need work so that they can support themselves. Jen explained that the New England Foundation for the Arts had taken over Matchbook, the agency could consider re-engaging with it and see how the tool is evolving. Cecil agreed with Sandy and said she was hearing similar things in the LCC listening sessions she was attending; lots of innovative ideas among artists, and the agency should work in support of that.

Jo-Ann suggested the agency might need to reallocate the resources it currently has and that would be a strategic planning discussion.

Victoria asked what Jo-Ann thought the next steps should be and Jo-Ann said she'd like to see what the recommendations were from staff, experts, and Council members. Barbara agreed and said the more she listened the more she'd like to see funds invested in communities to pay artists.

Kathy asked if the plan was to fund more or fewer artist fellowships and finalists and if so, how the agency would do that. Victoria explained that the staff was looking to learn the Committee Members' priorities. That a plan was not possible yet, because no budget was known. Kathy said she believed things could not operate as usual, so thought would need to be given to how the agency conducted business. Jen explained that typically we would have staff make recommendations heading into the August meeting, however this meeting was added so Council members could add their thoughts before recommendations were made. Kathy agreed the meeting was a great opportunity for dialogue and added that there is a great deal of unrest in the country due to inequity and she would like to see that addressed in the agency's plans. Karen Barry agreed.

Victoria asked that the Committee give feedback on the agenda for its next meeting on June 9th.

At this point Jo-Ann Davis had to leave the meeting due to another appointment.

Barbara asked if the agency would still be required to allocate a certain percent of its budget to grants. She remarked that the staff has been effective and smart, that the agency does more than make grants, she does not want to see staff sacrificed. Anita assured Barbara that in leadership meetings the team had run various scenarios reflecting possible cuts and had prioritized staff since they see Mass Cultural Council as a service agency. David added that the 75% to grants Barbara had referenced was not new in terms of practice, it was just newly written down in budget language. Victoria said that what she was hearing was that no matter the budget size the team was dedicated to keeping that percentage. Jen responded that this was written into the FY20 budget, and might not appear in the FY21 budget.

Victoria asked the Committee members to consider the agenda for the June 9th meeting. All Committee members were in favor of keeping the agenda as it had been drafted and hearing from three additional program areas. Victoria also asked Committee members to consider the 75/25 budget distribution.

Anita reiterated that the hope is for the next meeting, like this one, to be a discussion since we are not aware what the budget will be.

Victoria thanked Committee members and staff for their time and preparatory work.

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 June 9) and as Chair adjourned the meeting.