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*Power of culture*

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

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

### **MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2025**

#### **ONLINE MEETING**

**Committee Members Present** were

Cecil Barron-Jensen, Co-Chair of the Programs Committee  
Julie Wake, Co-Chair of the Programs Committee  
Marc Carroll, Council Chair  
Jo-Ann Davis, Council Vice Chair  
Emily Bramhall  
Donna Haghghat  
Ashley Occhino  
Mark Snyder

**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 and Chief Financial Officer  
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs  
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff  
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager  
Dan Blask, Program Manager  
Carolyn Cole, Special Projects Manager for Advancement  
Summer Confuorto, Program Officer  
Lillian Lee, Program Officer  
Sara Glidden, Program Manager  
Carolyn Cole, Program Officer

Co-Chair Cecil Barron Jensen called the meeting to order at 1:03pm and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement. David read the Open Meeting Law statement. Cecil then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their last meeting held on October 16, 2024, and called for a motion to approve them. Mark Snyder moved to approve the minutes; Programs

**Prepared on 3/28/25**

Committee Co-Chair Julie Wake seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Simone Early was absent all were in favor, and it was

RESOLVED: that the Programs Committee approves the minutes of the October 16, 2024 Programs Committee Meeting in the form presented at the meeting.

Cecil let Committee Members know that she and Co-Chair Julie Wake did not have anything official to report and unless there were questions, she would ask Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless to begin her update. There were no questions.

Jen began by sharing that she is excited about a new staffing configuration: Artists and Youth program staff members have formed one team under Program Manager Dan Blask. She then shared a document outlining grant program consolidation and realignment efforts that have taken place between FY21 and FY26. This effort has helped staff to broaden their focus and created time for work supporting the Agency's advancement goals. The document is available upon request.

The FY26 applications for two grant programs will open soon – Operating Grants for Organizations opens February 18 and closes April 17; Creative Experiences opens March 4 and closes April 30. Jen noted that YouthReach will now alternate with Operating Grants for Organizations and the Gaming Mitigation Program will be offered every other year.

Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis asked about statutory requirements for the annual distribution of Gaming funds. Jen clarified that eligible organizations are still able to receive Gaming grants but must choose between the Gaming Mitigation Fund and Operating Grants for Organizations; and Dave added that while  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the funds must be used for a "gaming mitigation program", the statute does not dictate frequency with which grants are to be made.

Mark Snyder asked how staff anticipate changes within the federal government might impact Mass Cultural Council. Michael explained that 80% of FY25 funds from the National Endowment for the Arts have been received; the last 20% has been requested and approved and it is anticipated the Agency will receive them soon. The future- FY26 and thereafter- is unknown and once more is revealed, senior staff will work to formulate a plan to adapt to any changes.

Mark then asked how ready the staff is to determine if applicants are receiving more than one grant. Jen explained that the process is 90% of the way there and all done through the Grants Management System. Mass Cultural Council is aiming to implement safeguards so that people can only apply for opportunities they are eligible for. The goal is to take this in stages, ensuring organizations don't feel like they're suddenly losing support. By allowing applicants to apply for all opportunities they qualify for and select the most beneficial grant, we provide flexibility while maintaining control over the process. Michael's outreach to the largest affected organizations has already yielded positive results. Increasing the number of new organizations we can fund is a priority. While some in the sector may initially feel disappointed, we've found that when we explain the rationale behind these changes, there is a better understanding of the approach. Michael added that it is rare for organizations to receive multiple grants each year from the same funder and that the cultural asset mapping data shows that

the cultural sector is far larger than anyone understood it to be; the number of declined applications will continue to increase.

Cecil asked if there is a certain approach Council Members should take when they spread the word about grant opportunities so that applications are encouraged but disappointment is mitigated.

Jen explained that the Agency always wants to encourage applicants and prioritizes new applicants to ensure we're reaching a broader audience. The success rate for organizational applicants is around 70%, down from 90%, while for individuals, the success rate is only 14%. Dan Blask shared that while 14% sounds low, it's triple what the success rate was in FY21. Jen continued sharing that the team strives to make applications as simple and concise as possible, recognizing that not everyone will receive funding. The goal is to lower barriers to entry while maintaining a fair and accessible process. Michael added that this is the main reason the Agency is ramping up Advancement efforts; grant dollars will never be enough to be able to meet the need that exists within the sector.

Emily Bramhall asked if Operating Grants for Organizations are two-year grants or one-year grants since Jen shared the program would be offered every other year. Jen explained that they are four-year grants, and the program application is open every two years.

There were no further questions.

Cecil asked Special Projects Manager for Advancement Carolyn Cole for her update on the Cultural Districts Initiative redesign. Carolyn gave a presentation on the project thus far. The staff is working in collaboration with Civic Moxie on the redesign and has engaged more than 25 state agencies in the process. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Cecil asked Carolyn if she had engaged Chambers of Commerce in the process. Chambers of Commerce were not a focus group, but some current districts are managed by their city or town's Chamber.

Mark agreed with Cecil and encouraged the team to work with Chambers of Commerce as they move ahead with the project as he knows they can be a big help especially with public relations efforts.

There were no further questions.

Cecil encouraged Committee Members to do their Conflict-of-Interest training if they hadn't already. She then asked David to review the Conflict-of-Interest list before moving on to a vote on additional FY25 grants. David reviewed the list with the Committee and there were no updates. Cecil then asked Jen to give a brief report on the grants the Committee would be voting to recommend.

Jen explained that Committee Members received a memo from each staff team in their meeting materials and shared a few highlights:

**Gaming Mitigation:** A big congratulations to Program Officer Lillian Lee for her work on the program alongside Sara Glidden and the Grants team. While the total number of grantees remains the same, 34% are new to Gaming. Lillian led a re-design conversation that expanded access for less traditional presenting models, making the process easier for both applicants and staff. Decisions came down to the wire as applicants made decisions about whether to receive a Gaming grant or an Operating grant.

**Operating Grants for Organizations & Cultural Investment Portfolio:** With decisions finalized, we were able to add additional grantees. Committee Members will notice two organizations that should have been on the November list but were left off, plus one new addition.

**Grants for Creative Individuals:** The application success rate landed at 14%, and the team gained valuable insights into the applicant pool—56% were new applicants, and 98% are receiving their first Mass Cultural Council grant. Also, with some reshuffling and cancellations to be evaluated in the next week, the February Council meeting will include 12 more grantees beyond what is listed in today's materials, which we're excited to identify and support.

Jen thanked the Programs team for their hard work.

Cecil asked if there were any questions for Jen or the team and there were none. She then asked for a motion to approve the grant recommendations. Julie moved to approve the recommendations; Donna seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Simone Early was absent and that the following Committee Members did not deliberate or participate in the vote on the following organizations:

Marc Carroll

- a. Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
- b. The Rivers School

Jo-Ann Davis

- a. The Care Center
- b. Springfield Museums
- c. MASS Creative

Cecil Barron Jensen

- a. Artists Association of Nantucket
- b. Egan Maritime Institute
- c. Nantucket Cultural District

Donna Haghghat

- a. WAM Theater

Julie Wake

- a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod

Ashley Occhino

- a. Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition/One South Coast Chamber Foundation
- b. Southeastern Massachusetts Visitors Bureau

- c. SouthCoast Community Foundation
- d. Society of Arts and Crafts

It was

RESOLVED: To recommend to the full Council approval of the Gaming Mitigation Fund grants as described and presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: To recommend approval by the full Council the final list of Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Programs Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: To recommend to the full Council approval of the Grants for Creative Individuals as described and presented at the Programs Committee Meeting

The end of the agenda had been reached and Cecil, as Co-Chair, adjourned the meeting at 1:56pm.