



*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, JUNE 25, 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  
Simone Early  
Donna Haghighat  
Anika Lopes  
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, Chief Financial Officer  
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs  
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff  
Dan Blask, Program Manager  
Sara Glidden, Program Manager  
Lisa Simmons, Program Manager  
Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager  
Jay Paget, Program Director

Co-Chair Julie Wake 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. Julie then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their last meeting held on February 12, 2025, and called for a motion to approve them. Mark Snyder moved to approve the minutes; Emily Bramhall seconded the motion. By roll call vote all were in favor, and it was

**Prepared on 7/28/25**

RESOLVED: that the Programs Committee approves the minutes of the February 12, 2025 Programs Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Julie provided two brief updates from the Executive Committee meeting that took place earlier that day:

- Funding reports for each state legislator, including names, grant amounts, and geographic location, are now available on the Agency's website. Committee Members are encouraged to review them to better understand the breadth of funding across their respective regions.
- The future of funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was also discussed at the Executive Committee Meeting, and Julie asked David to provide an update.

David explained that the Agency was notified of a \$1.31 million FY26 NEA grant for Mass Cultural Council. However, accepting these funds requires the Agency and its subgrantees to certify compliance with current federal anti-discrimination regulations. This includes affirming that no programs support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives—per the current presidential administration's Executive Order on the matter. Mass Cultural Council is confident its programs comply with federal civil rights law, but the current federal interpretation creates significant challenges, so we are reviewing the matter carefully. Accepting the funds could potentially expose Mass Cultural Council and its grantees to federal actions which could threaten the Agency's mission and practices. This issue will be discussed further at an upcoming senior staff retreat. Initial assessment suggests it could be difficult to accept the funds.

Michael emphasized that equity, diversity and inclusion are embedded into the Agency's operations and accepting the funding creates a risk that it could dismantle vital work that benefits the sector. Dave noted the NEA funds represent only about 4-5% of Mass Cultural Council's budget. Mark Snyder expressed support for not accepting the funds and suggested taking a vote and issuing a press release to explain the decision, potentially attracting new donors. Cecil clarified that a vote wasn't necessary, as the Executive Committee had already supported this direction and would leave Michael and staff to consider the matter and strategize a respectable way to decline if that was necessary.

Julie then asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Michael highlighted work happening across the Agency with grant programs, the creation of a draft spending plan for FY26, advocacy, and advancement – the team is building strong relationships across state government, especially through the re-design of the Cultural Districts Initiative. He noted that between 50 and 60 new cross-sector relationships and partnerships are currently in development. The team has also continued to share the findings of the Cultural Asset Inventory with successful briefings held in Worcester, Cambridge, and virtually with Philanthropy MA. A future briefing for the Office of Labor & Workforce Development is being scheduled.

There were no questions for Michael. Julie asked Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless for her Programs report.

Jen provided a comprehensive overview of FY25 grantmaking and a look ahead at FY26 plans. A detailed slide deck was shared; a copy is available upon request.

Programs Committee Co-Chair Cecil Barron Jensen asked if staff is receiving any pushback from grantees due to newly introduced waiting periods between grant eligibility years. Jen noted disappointment but emphasized broad sector support for rotational access to funds driven by our diversity, equity and inclusion principles. Michael added that, with over 15,000 arts organizations in Massachusetts, it's difficult to justify multiple grants to a few organizations while many receive none. Cecil supported the approach and praised its clarity and intentionality. Michael reminded Committee Members that as awareness grows, grant applications will increase.

Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis expressed her concern about the low percentage of funded creative individuals grant applications which is around 14% and asked when the NASAA 2024 data will be available. Jen stated that the NASAA 2024 data is typically available in January or February. Michael pointed to the evolution from 75 artist fellowships per year to 400 creative individuals grants and Jen noted that although individual grants are impactful, they are also labor-intensive to administer; but success rates are improving up from 9% to 14% from last year to this year.

Cecil mentioned that forthcoming programs like the MITx partnership will help, noting that grants are only one tool for artists and career sustainability.

Emily Bramhall asked about the effect of increased outreach and access on grant amounts. Jen shared that the Agency has eliminated very small grants (e.g., \$250), raising the floor to \$2,500 and keeping the maximum stable. This ensures greater impact, especially for smaller-budget organizations. Emily praised the focus on grant impact and efforts to bring new organizations into the fold.

Ashley Occhino asked about individual grant tracking and reporting requirements. Jen explained that Mass Cultural Council does not require final reports from individuals.

Next, Program Managers including Dan Blask, Sara Glidden, Lisa Simmons, and Jay Paget gave brief updates on plans for each of their grant programs proposed for FY26. Updates included:

#### **Grants for Creative Individuals**

- Debrief from the second round of the new program and propose any necessary updates to it. No major changes anticipated.
- Run third year of the program in FY26.

#### **Folk & Traditional Arts**

- Continue developing relationships with immigrant, folk, and traditional artists and arts organizations to support outreach and recruitment for Grants for Creative Individuals and other Agency programs.
- Support Native American & Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee work

### **YouthReach**

- Fund one-year extension of current YouthReach grants. Recipients will be allowed one final year of overlap with OGO/CIP but grant amounts will be capped at max award of OGO/CIP.
- Open revised YouthReach program in FY26 for FY27 funding.

### **Operating Support**

- Second year of Operating Grants for Organizations.
- Continued support/funding for remaining Cultural Investment Portfolio recipients as program concludes.
- Continuation of Equity Impact points in formula for third year incorporating addition of financial health/need into funding formula.
- Next application will open in FY27 for FY28 funding.

### **Gaming Mitigation Fund**

- Second year of two-year grant (FY25 – FY26)
- Next application cycle will open in FY27.

### **Card to Culture**

- At least 115 organizations joined in FY25.
- To date, 565 participating Card to Culture organizations have provided more than 1 million free or steeply discounted admissions for Massachusetts residents of limited means.
- The program will continue with no major changes planned for FY26.

### **Creative Experiences**

- A new program combining Festivals & Projects and Creative Projects for Schools (formerly known as STARS Residencies).
- Grants of \$2,500 or \$5,000.
- Application deadline has passed. Funding recommendations will be made at the August Council Meeting.
- FY27 program will launch in spring of FY26.

### **Local & Tribal Cultural Council Programs**

- Second year of Tribal Cultural Council program. Four will launch in September, looking at two possible additions during the year.
- FY26 will lay groundwork for and encourage regionalization of Local Cultural Councils and introduce them to advancement opportunities and approaches.

### **Cultural District Investment Grants**

- There are no major changes proposed for FY26 grants, but they will change for FY27 and beyond.
- Roll out new Cultural District Designation program in the fall.
- Current Districts will be the first group to apply, the launch for new districts will be later.

### **Universal Participation (UP)**

- Continue Innovation Fund Grant as annual grant to UP Designated organizations.
- Award second grant to an access/inclusion organization to launch web-based learning hub in FY26

- Redefine UP Designation and Up Innovation and Learning Network for FY27 launch
- Support Disability Advisory Committee work

#### **Cultural Facilities Fund**

- Recommending small number of FY25 applicants for funding in the fall.
- Opening new application for next cycle in October.
- Capital grantees now have two-year waiting period.
- Will continue to work on ways to highlight and promote climate resiliency and carbon neutral planning and projects through workshops/trainings.

Jen closed with a recognition of the entire Programs and Grants teams praising their flexibility, excellence, and ongoing commitment to equity, public service, and innovation. Michael offered additional praise noting that the Cultural Districts re-design, new focus on climate strategy and decarbonization, and social prescription projects all have some particularly exciting and impactful things on the horizon; he also added that the MITx arts entrepreneurship course will launch in January – it will be free for Massachusetts artists.

Cecil shared that there have been efforts on Nantucket focused on decarbonization specifically with reuse and salvage efforts; Jay confirmed plans to include reuse and salvage efforts in Mass Cultural Council's climate toolkit. Cecil also asked if the Card to Culture program offered reimbursement to participating organizations and Sara clarified that it does not.

Julie commended the entire staff team for their efforts. There was no further discussion and Julie, as Co-Chair, adjourned the meeting at 2:23pm.