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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

PROGRAMS COMMITTEE BOOK

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025

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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
PROGRAMS COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025

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**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
PROGRAMS COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025
1:00 -2:30 PM**

ON-LINE MEETING

BROADCAST MEETING

**MEETING WILL BE LIVESTREAMED AT
[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/LIVE/MYF5Y28PPQQ](https://www.youtube.com/live/myf5y28ppqq)**

**MEETING MATERIALS WILL BE POSTED ONLINE AT
[HTTPS://MASSCULTURALCOUNCIL.ORG/ABOUT/BOARD/](https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/board/)
UNDER "AUGUST 6, 2025 PROGRAMS COMMITTEE MEETING"**

<u>AGENDA</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
1. Call to Order- Open Meeting Law Notice	
2. Minutes- June 25, 2025	X
3. Reports- FY26 Grants and Program Plan	
4. Conflict of Interest Notifications	
FY26 Grant and Program Recommendations	X
5. Advancement	
a. Mass Humanities	
b. New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)	
c. MASSCreative	
d. MassPort Artist Program	

- e. National Endowment for the Arts-Arts & Health
 - f. MIT Sloan School of Management
6. Organizations
 - a. Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations (Appendix A & Appendix B)
 7. Communities
 - a. Cultural District Investment Grants (Appendix c)
 - b. Local Cultural Councils (Appendix D)
 - c. Tribal Cultural Councils
 8. Arts Education & Youth
 - a. YouthReach (Appendix E)
 - b. Creative Youth Development and Education Grants
 9. Equity and Inclusion
 - a. Creative Experiences (Appendix F)
 - b. UP Innovation Fund Grants (Appendix G)
 - c. Equity, Inclusion, and Access Grants
 10. Adjourn



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE

(IN ADVANCE OF THE 166TH MEETING OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL ON AUGUST 19, 2025)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025

RESOLUTIONS

Section 2

RESOLVED: that the Programs Committee approves the minutes of the June 25, 2025 Programs Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Sections 5 to 9

WHEREAS the Massachusetts State Budget for Fiscal 2026 has been signed into law and contains an appropriation of \$26,045,152 (plus \$930,000 in earmarks) for the Mass Cultural Council for FY26 (the "FY26 State Budget"); and

WHEREAS, previously today Mass Cultural Council's Executive Committee recommended to the Council for approval a draft of the FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Plan submitted by staff; and

WHEREAS, based on such Plan staff has recommended grant allocations for Mass Cultural Council programs to the Programs Committee at its meeting on August 6, 2025 ("Programs Committee Meeting"),

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: That, the Programs Committee, recommends that the Council approve the allocation of grants and processes and procedures presented at the Programs Committee Meeting in accordance with the following resolutions:

Section 5(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council a grant to Mass Humanities totaling \$983,056 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council a grant to NEFA of \$70,000, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(c)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council a grant to MASSCreative for \$30,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(d)

RESOLVED: To recommend a grant of \$5,000 to MassPort to support their Live Music At Logan program as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(e)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council implementation of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)-funded Arts & Health Project in the amount of \$75,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(f)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council a grant to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (or related entity) for \$10,000 for the MITx Arts Entrepreneurship Online Program as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 6(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend endorsement of the approach by staff to provide \$7,200,000 in unrestricted operating support grant to cultural organizations under both the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend up to \$870,000 in Cultural District grants as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend an allocation to the Local Cultural Councils totaling \$5,700,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(c)

RESOLVED: To recommend up to \$103,950 allocation to Tribal Cultural Councils as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 8(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend grant allocation to the YouthReach program in the amount of \$1,870,000, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 8(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend a Creative Youth Development and Education grants in the amount of \$36,000 to the Youth Arts Impact Network with EdVestors and \$25,000 in support of the NEA-funded Poetry Out Loud program, all as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 9(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend approval of the Creative Experiences program grants totaling \$3,350,000 and an additional \$25,000 from the NEA for program applicants focusing on "America 250," all as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 9(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council \$465,000 in UP Innovation Fund Grants, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 9(c)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council a \$1000,000 grant to Open Door Arts for the Arts and Culture Accessibility Resource Hub, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

General

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the ability of staff to re-allocate unused grant funds for any program to any other recommended program as described throughout the memo presented to the Programs Committee.



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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.



Power of culture

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless
Dt: August 6, 2025
Re: FY25 Grant and Program Recommendations

Overview. In FY26 the Mass Cultural Council is poised to make an estimated 2,200 grants through its programs totaling approximately \$26.16 million. In FY25, across all direct programs and including the Local Cultural Council Program, we had just over **19,000 applications** come in through our grants management system. We presented [analysis of our FY25 grant making](#) to the Programs Committee in June.

The program teams, including the grant management system team, put in an immense amount of work and time supporting applicants, potential applicants, and grantees. We expect a similar volume in FY26. The following memos describe the FY26 grantmaking in more detail. In all cases, staff is requesting that the Programs Committee recommend the proposals for approval by the full Council on August 19.

All grant allocation amounts below are based upon the Executive Committee's approval and recommendation of Mass Cultural Council's FY 25 Spending Plan on August 6, 2025.

**** Please note-** there are two programs which have historically been included in the August memos- **Grants for Creative Individuals** and the **Gaming Mitigation Program**. However, due to the revised timing for these two grant programs, they are not included in this memo and will be brought to the Programs Committee and Council for the October meetings.

Advancement Grants

(Agenda Item 5 (a)-5(f))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless,
Bethann Steiner, Erik Holmgren, Carolyn Cole, Ann Petruccelli Moon

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: Advancement Grants

Recommendations

Organization	Initiative	Grant
Mass Humanities	Partnership Grant	\$983,056
New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)	New England State Touring (NEST)/Annual Grant	\$70,000
MASSCreative	Passthrough - Artist Stipends at State House Event(s)	\$30,000
Massport Artist Program	Support for artists busking at airport	\$5,000
National Endowment of the Arts: Art & Health Project	Expanding Arts Prescription through Community Health Centers	\$75,000
MIT Sloan School of Management	MITx Arts Entrepreneurship Online Program	\$10,000

\$1,173,056

Mass Humanities. In the FY26 budget we are recommending **\$983,056** for our annual partnership grant with the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities (Mass Humanities). The proposed partnership award for FY26 is approximately .6% (\$5,667) greater than the amount awarded in FY25. The percentage increase is the same as the percentage increase in Mass Cultural Council's FY26 state appropriation from the amount received for FY25 (in both cases, after earmarks). We have an agreement with Mass Humanities that this grant will increase or decrease at the same percentage rate as our state appropriation from one year to the next which is documented in a signed Memorandum of Agreement.

This partnership goes back more than twenty years. The partnership is renewed each year through a vote of the full Council.

New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA). In providing an annual grant to NEFA, Mass Cultural Council considers annual funding requests from NEFA for projects and activities that specifically benefit the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In addition, Mass Cultural Council requires an annual accounting of NEFA's expenditure of any Mass Cultural Council funding showing of the benefits to Massachusetts. We work closely with and collaborate with

NEFA throughout the year as an important regional and local arts organization representing the region on issues of mutual interest.

Staff proposes FY26 funding in of **\$70,000** to NEFA in accordance with the support structure from the states which NEFA has proposed. In FY25, Massachusetts provided \$70,000 to NEFA.

We will have available upon request from members a report from NEFA detailing the use of our FY25 award of \$70,000 which was used to support its New England States Touring (NEST) Program for the benefit of Massachusetts artists and venues.

MASSCreative. For the third year in a row, Mass Cultural Council will join the coalition co-hosting Creative Sector Day at the State House - a day on Beacon Hill to celebrate and amplify the contributions of artists, creatives, cultural nonprofits, and creative businesses in Massachusetts with our elected leaders. This day-long event will feature performances and displays by artists across the Commonwealth, presentations by cultural organizations and storytelling by creative businesses. This is NOT a lobby day, but a visibility and celebration day that will acknowledge the economic impacts and contributions of the creative sector and help build public support for artists, creatives and cultural organizations. As co-host, we propose awarding **\$30,000** to compensate performing artists and cultural organizations at the event. As a matter of administrative simplicity, Mass Cultural Council will award the funds to MassCreative, who will pay the individual artists and organizations directly.

Massport Artist Program. At Mass Cultural Council, we've been [rethinking our role and how we can make a deeper impact](#). While grants remain a cornerstone of our support, we're looking beyond them—toward jobs, fee-for-service contracts, and the integration of arts and culture into every corner of public life in Massachusetts. That means working across government agencies, forming public-private partnerships, and looking for new ways to inject creativity where you might not expect it. To that end a pilot pop-up concert program called [Live Music at Logan](#) has taken flight at Logan Airport's Terminal B and C baggage claims. The program is [a partnership between Mass Cultural Council and Massport](#). To support the pilot, staff recommend awarding **\$5,000** to Massport to be spent on payments made to artists performing at the airport.

National Endowment of the Arts: Art & Health Project. The Mass Cultural Council was a pioneer in the implementation of arts prescriptions in the United States. The first phase was launched in 2020 and ran for more than three years offered [CultureRx: Social Prescription](#) - a pilot program utilizing arts experiences as part of patient treatment plans. . In 2023 we partnered with Dr. Tasha Golden and the [EpiArts Lab](#) at [UF Center for Arts in Medicine](#) to publish [Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities](#) as a roadmap for developing "Arts on Prescription" programs throughout the nation. In 2024, the Mass Cultural

Council partnered with [Art Pharmacy](#) to scale the program and, in that same year, the partnership launched the [first statewide arts prescription program](#) in the United States.

The FY26 Arts Prescription grants, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, represent an expansion of this groundbreaking work. The goal is to support Community Health Centers who work primarily with patients utilizing MassHealth to implement arts prescriptions as a component of patient treatment plans.

This program provides up to **\$75,000** in total funds and may fund up to three grants that deploy arts prescriptions for patients between January 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026. The list of grantees will be submitted for approval at the October Council meeting.

MITx Arts Entrepreneurship Online Program. Last year, the Council approved a grant to Massachusetts Institute of Technology's online learning program (MITx) for the program described below.

Artists are entrepreneurs. Artists are small business owners. They are entrepreneurs that too often haven't been equipped with the business skills needed to unlock their success. This free online asynchronous program seeks to inspire in artists the characteristics that will help them strategically and sustainably commercialize their work and run successful, arts- based businesses.

Current education/training/learning in arts largely focuses on teaching skills related to the artist's craft, less so on business and technology skills. For artists to thrive sustainably in the future, they need knowledge and skills in:

Business: Building and commercializing an audience

Technology: Incorporating technology into the craft and the business

Learning Objectives: At the end of the program, the learner will...

- o Know: Common language/vernacular for running your own arts business
- o Feel: More confident in the business side of art
- o Do: Disciplined process to identify and develop customer base

Request. At MIT, entrepreneurship is a craft that can be taught and applied in any context because it is centered around challenge identification and opportunity maximization. It is in this spirit that Prof. Ben Shields and Lecturer Jenny Larios Berlin have come together to bring their expertise in entrepreneurship and the business of culture production to launch an MITx course in Arts Entrepreneurship that will be available and free to any learner interested in this material. We are seeking at

least \$10,000 in unrestricted funds to help us with the following (this is an illustrative list):

- Pre-production: content development that integrates and expands material from existing MIT courses
- Production: filming of the 12 modules that will comprise this course
- Post-production: editing, formatting, and installing into the MITx online platform, as well as recruiting course assistants to help with the course delivery (e.g., assignment review and hosting of reflection sessions with the participants)
- Course launch: marketing of the course to ensure the community we are seeking to reach knows that they have this resource available to them
- Course delivery: this covers the operational elements needed to deliver the course."

For the reasons stated above, Mass Cultural Council staff is recommending a **\$10,000** FY26 grant.

Additional Advancement Activities. In addition to the above requests, please be aware that we are also engaging in the following activities which may or may not be classified as "grants" depending on further investigation and will be addressed at future Committee and Council meetings. The items below are being included here on an informational basis and no recommendation as to funding is being sought at this meeting

- **Catalyst to Open Arts Benefit Market.** Staff envisions proposing a **\$10,000** in funding to help jump start the concept of employee arts benefit plans and connect Massachusetts employees with arts and cultural benefits that enhance well-being, creativity, and workplace engagement. Specific terms and conditions have yet to be developed and will be described and if classified as a grant, will be submitted for recommendation and approval at future Committee and Council Meetings.
- **Mass Challenge and Higher Education** –Staff is proposing to set aside up to **\$50,000** in funding to support two initiatives: one to elevate creativity as a vital component of the innovation economy through work with Mass Challenge, and another to advance a collective agenda for integrating business and civic leadership training into post-secondary arts degree programs. Further details will be shared and if classified as grants, specific recommendations and approvals will be sought at future meetings.

Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations

(Agenda Item 6(a))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee
Dt: August 6, 2025
Re: Operating Grants for Organizations and Cultural Investment Portfolio

Summary

In this section, you will find proposed information on the operating support grant programs for nonprofit cultural organizations and Cultural Affiliates (programs with a parent organization) in Mass Cultural Council's programs: **Operating Support for Organizations**, and the **Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP or "Portfolio")**.

A total of **\$7,200,000** has been allocated towards these grant programs to support organizations. This amount is consistent with the allocation for organization support programs for FY25 and includes the amount allocated to the Portfolio, and the Operating Grants for Organizations.

Background

CIP was launched in 2009 to support organizations with multi-year grants to nonprofit organizations that provide public programs in the arts, sciences, and humanities in Massachusetts. Organizations were assigned to the Portfolio primarily based on track record of successful applications to previous Mass Cultural Council operating grant programs.

In 2021, the CIP team was directed to conduct an internal review of the program with the goals of maintaining the values that are important to grantees – the availability of unrestricted operating support that is reliable and predictable – while also centering equity in our evaluation and program revisions. We made our first announcement about changes coming to the Portfolio program in April 2022. The changes fell into two categories: the sunseting of the existing Portfolio grant program, and the launch of the new Operating Grants for Organizations program.

Sunsetting the Portfolio

The existing Portfolio program will be phased out through FY29. For purposes of transitioning into the new program, current Portfolio grantees were randomly assigned to a final year of support from the Portfolio grant program. After the final year of support, an organization must successfully apply to the new Operating Grants for Organizations program for continued operating support going forward. Organizations were sorted by budget size, and then randomly assigned to a fiscal year for Portfolio grant expiration, with some adjustments to

address geographical distribution. The final year for Portfolio support is aligned with the application cycles of the Operating Grants for Organizations, so that former Portfolio recipients may apply to the Operating Grants for Organizations.

Operating Grants for Organizations

The first application cycle of the Operating Grants for Organizations was launched in March 2024, with June 13 as the application deadline. In October 2025, 160 organizations were recommended for grants from this program. Five organizations opted to receive a grant from the Gaming Mitigation program rather than the Operating Grants for Organizations award, and one grant was cancelled.

The application for the second round of Operating Grants for Organizations opened in February 2025 with the deadline of April 17, 2025. There were two significant changes to the program. 1) the commitment for this program is 4 grant years, reduced from five, and 2) the program will be open for applications every other year, alternating with the YouthReach program applications. That means that successful applicants will receive a grant for FY26 – FY29, and that the next application for this program will be in the spring of 2027, for grants from FY28 – 31, subject to the legislative appropriations, and the spending plans approved by the Council.

We received 465 applications for this round, and ninety-seven (97) applications were determined to be ineligible because they did not meet the eligibility outlined in the published guidelines. The 368 eligible applications were assigned to five budget groupings, so that applications were reviewed along with other organizations of comparable financial resources. The applications were reviewed by a group of internal staff and independent reviewers who scored the applications based on the program criteria which are aligned with the Mass Cultural Council values as presented in the current strategic plan. The highest scoring applications of each budget panel have been recommended for funding.

Grant Awards

Following the completed application review, the awards for the Operating Grants for Organizations are calculated with the continuing Operating Grant recipients, and the remaining Portfolio organizations in one funding formula.

Grant awards are based on a formula that considers a three-year average of an organization's cash expenses (Formula Expenses). Awards are recalculated annually and vary based on the resources allocated to the Organizations grants by the Council, as well as whether an organization's Formula Expenses increase or decrease.

We will continue to implement Equity Impact Points (described in previous Council write-ups) as part of the funding formula calculation, which will increase

grant amounts for organizations that meet certain criteria. This includes organizations that are identified as financially stressed based on the Financial Health analysis protocol that we have developed, and we also support [BIPOC-Centered](#) organizations (this is a self-identification for organizations that are BIPOC led and/or run, and whose primary mission, programming and/or practices explicitly and specifically reflect and serve one or more communities that self-identify as BIPOC).

Additional information about the process can be found in **Appendix A**.

Please note that at present, staff is requesting that the Program Committee recommend endorsement of this approach to the full Council. The full list of grantees is available in Appendix A, and a list of grant awards will be submitted for approval at the Council meeting on August 19. The list of FY26 grantees will be provided in **Appendix B**.

To the extent not all such \$7,200,000 set aside can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

- Sara Glidden, Program Manager, Organizations (617) 858-2710
- Kalyn King, Program Officer, Creative Experiences and Organizations (617) 858-2718
- Lillian Lee, Program Officer, Organizations and Gaming Mitigation (617) 858-2737
- Lindiana Flores, Program Officer, Organizations, and Card to Culture program 617-858-2826

Cultural District Investment Grants

(Agenda Item 7(a))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons
Re: Cultural Districts Initiative
Dt: August 6, 2025

Summary. For FY26, we are recommending an **\$870,000** allocation to the Cultural Districts Initiative to support placemaking and placekeeping efforts in prospective districts. This represents level funding from FY25. Staff is recommending a \$15,000 grant per district, consistent with what was approved in FY 25. There are currently fifty (58) districts designated.

Background.

To receive funds, a municipality must apply through a streamlined acceptance form agreeing to allocate the funds in support of Cultural District activities and goals. Unless otherwise directed, the funds will go to the municipality to disburse. Applications are reviewed internally by staff. The grant must be spent in FY26, and an Annual Report is due in May 2026.

The Cultural District Designation program (the process by which communities get a cultural district recognized) will be relaunched in FY26. While this process does not affect the grants to the existing districts in FY26, we wanted to note that we are not taking new applications to the Cultural District program in FY26, we will first allow existing districts to get into compliance with the new program. Additional communities will need to wait until the program reopens in FY27.

The grants to the current Cultural Council Districts can be found in **Appendix C**. Thank you for your ongoing support of the Cultural Districts Initiative program.

To the extent not all such \$870,000 set aside can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

Local Cultural Council Program

(Agenda Item 7(b))

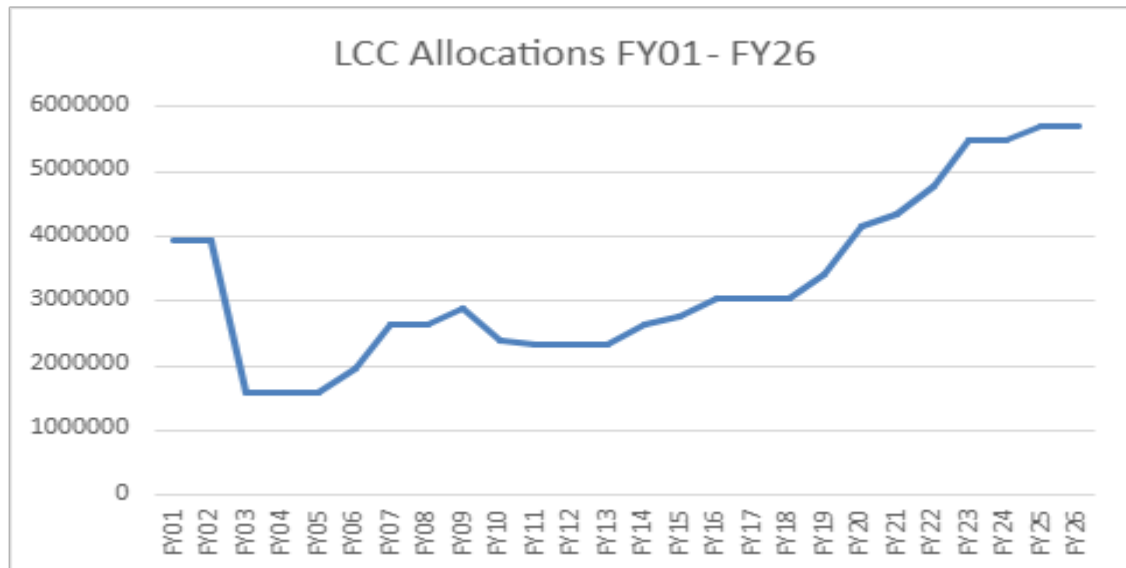
To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Timothea Pham, Sommers Smith, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: FY26 Local Cultural Council Allocations

Summary. This memo presents recommended allocations for each of Mass Cultural Council's 329 Local Cultural Councils (LCCs) in FY26. Mass Cultural Council's FY25 Spending Plan calls for an allocation of **\$5,700,000** to the Local Cultural Council Program. This figure represents level funding from the previous FY25 fiscal year. For reference, this chart summarizes the last 25 years of LCC Program allocations.



LCC Allocations. The recommended allocations for all 329 Local Cultural Councils are detailed in **Appendix D**.

Consistent with Mass Cultural Council's enabling act, each council's individual allocation is determined by following the Department of Revenue's formula distribution of lottery funds to each city and town, which is done using a state local aid formula, based on population and property values. It is weighted towards communities with lower property values and/or larger populations. The minimum level a council will receive is \$5,700. In FY26, 107 communities (30% of municipalities) will receive the minimum allocation.

Tribal Cultural Council Program

(Agenda Item 7(c))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Timothea Pham, Sommers Smith, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong, Erin Genia

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: FY26 Tribal Cultural Council Program

Summary. The FY26 Spending Plan allocates **\$103,950** for the Tribal Cultural Council Program, an expansion of the Local Cultural Council Program for between 4 and 6 Tribal Cultural Councils. The recommended allocation per council is \$17,325, which is the average Local Cultural Council allocation.

Background. Mass Cultural Council recently completed a [Native American and Indigenous People's Equity Plan](#). While working on the plan, we also worked with a task force comprised of Native American and Indigenous people and the Massachusetts' Commission on Indian Affairs (MCIA) to create an equivalent regranteeing program to our [Local Cultural Council Program](#) for Tribal Governments in recognition of their inherent tribal sovereignty and right to self-determination. Through the expanded program, Tribal Governments will be able to establish their own Tribal Cultural Council. The Tribal Cultural Council Program:

- Provides funding that Tribal Cultural Councils can regrant to the benefit of their community and use to support its own projects and initiatives; and
- Is driven by local autonomy. Tribal Cultural Councils can tailor the program to their unique goals, define what community benefit means to their community, and set local priorities.

For the first year of the program, based on the Tribal Task Force Meetings, we have invited the following Tribes to take part:

1. Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band and Chaubunagungamaug Band of Nipmuck Indians
2. Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe
3. Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe
4. Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah)

Additionally, the Task Force recommended establishing a 5th and possibly 6th TCC; an Intertribal Cultural Council that would serve Native American and Indigenous communities with ties to Massachusetts that are not Federally, or state recognized and/or Native American and Indigenous people who currently reside in Massachusetts, and whose native lands or territories are outside Massachusetts. The Task Force also recommended we connect with the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Indians. We are in very early conversations with them about the possibility of joining the program.

FY26 Grant Cycle. In FY25, the first TCC cycle, we had three Tribal Cultural Councils run grant cycles:

- [Aquinnah Wampanoag Cultural Council](#) in Aquinnah
- [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe Cultural Council \(HPWTCC\)](#) in Plymouth
- [Nipmuc/k Cultural Council](#) in Grafton

These TCCs will continue, and we anticipate that the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe will also join the program in September.

Please note that at present, staff is requesting that the Program Committee recommend to the full Council approval of the Tribal Cultural Council Program with allocations to be made to each TCC as it is established and ready to administer the program. To the extent not all 6 TCCs are not established during FY25, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any unused funds to other grant programs.

YouthReach

(Agenda Item 8(a))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Käthe Swaback, Amy Chu

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: FY26 YouthReach Extension Grants

Summary. We recommend extending some of the 85 existing YouthReach grants which are currently funded by the program at \$22,000 totaling \$1,870,000. We are recommending level funding the program at **\$1,870,000** in FY26 with variable award amounts per grantee.

Background. The YouthReach Initiative was launched in 1994 to support learning opportunities that infused youth development practices with creative experiences for young people— especially those at risk of not making a successful transition from adolescence to young adulthood. The program has received several national awards and has been replicated by the Ohio and Colorado arts councils. More than 40 YouthReach grant recipients have been also honored over the years with *National Arts & Humanities Youth Program* (formerly *Coming Up Taller*) awards from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, recognizing exemplary arts and humanities programs.

Massachusetts Cultural Council has consistently been a leader in the support and growth of work in Creative Youth Development. YouthReach is currently the longest running grant program to support CYD. 2026 marks the 12-year anniversary of the 2014 [National Summit on Creative Youth Development](#) when Mass Cultural Council hosted 200 thought leaders and helped catalyze the growth of CYD into a national field of practice.

FY26 Recommendations

We are recommending funding YouthReach grants totaling \$1,870,000. Mass Cultural Council has been working on redesigning and consolidating programs as part of the Agency's strategic plan. While we had hoped to reopen YouthReach for FY26 funding, due to program changes, realignment of grant cycles, and staff changes, we will reopen YouthReach for FY27 funding, but in FY26 we will provide extensions to most YouthReach organizations through the Extension Grants.

Eligibility for a YouthReach Extension Grant

Eligible organizations are those FY22-25 YouthReach grant recipients that:

- Do not receive FY26 funding from the Cultural Investment Portfolio or Operating Grants for Organizations.

OR

- Receive FY26 funding from Cultural Investment Portfolio or Operating Grants for Organizations that is less than the maximum FY26 operating support grant amount (\$55,000 in FY25)

OR

- Receive an FY26 Gaming Mitigation Fund grant for less than the maximum FY26 operating support grant amount (\$55,000 in FY25)

Organizations receiving the maximum award in Cultural Investment Portfolio or Operating Grants for Organizations or receiving a Gaming Mitigation Fund grant over that amount, are not eligible for the FY26 YouthReach Extension Grant. These changes are part of the [agency's effort to reach more organizations](#) by limiting the number of awards grantees can receive in a year.

Award Amount. Grant amounts will be determined by the money available, and the number of grantees:

- **Grantees not receiving FY26 operating support through [Cultural Investment Portfolio](#) or [Operating Grants for Organizations](#)** will receive a flat grant amount in FY25 the amount was \$22,000. In FY26 if funding permits the amount could be between \$22,000 and \$26,000. However, should the Mass Cultural Council receive a decrease in appropriation grants could be less than \$22,000.
- **Grantees also receiving FY26 operating support funding through [Cultural Investment Portfolio](#) or [Operating Grants for Organizations](#)** will be capped at the maximum amount set for Operating Grants for Organizations (\$55,000 in FY25). This means some organizations will get the full flat grant amount set for YouthReach recipients, and some will get a partial YouthReach award.

Please note that at present, staff is requesting that the Program Committee recommend endorsement of this approach to the full Council. Because the final grant list must first be set for Cultural Investment Portfolio and Operating Grants, the full list of YouthReach grant awards will be submitted for approval at the Council meeting on August 19. The grantee list will be provided in **Appendix E**.

To the extent that not all the \$1,870,000 set aside can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

(Agenda Item 8(b))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Käthe Swaback, Amy Chu

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

Overview. We are pleased to present for your review recommendations for funding for the Youth Arts Impact Network and Poetry Out Loud.

FY26 Recommendations

Organization	Initiative	Grant
Edvestors	Youth Arts Impact Network (YAIN)	\$36,000
Huntington Theatre Company	Poetry Out Loud (POL)	\$25,000

\$61,000

Youth Arts Impact Network (YAIN). With a goal of extending the services of convenings and consulting beyond the greater Boston area to the rest of the Commonwealth, Mass Cultural Council formalized our partnership with EdVestors in FY21 to support funding for the [Youth Arts Impact Network](#). Since then, we have partnered with EdVestors to bring these services to potential and existing Creative Youth Development (CYD) organizations and school-based partnership organizations outside of Boston. Quarterly YAIN convenings included topics of communication and data collection in schools, the role of CYD organizations in mental health and belonging, and mental health and wellness among CYD professionals. Additional in-person coffee chats were also attended by Mass Cultural Council and EdVestors staff.

Organizations throughout the state have now been able to access the services of consultant, Julia Gittleman, PhD for planning, evaluation, and program development support. In addition, they are able to participate in quarterly networking opportunities with related, shared monthly resources. By offering pro bono technical support to youth arts organizations statewide, Julia was able to consult with 18 organizations over more than 70 sessions in weekly office hours, covering topics including survey design, logic model design, data analysis, and reporting and representing considerable geographic diversity. These services covered a range of topics and served organizations of varying sizes and maturity.

One large benefit of YAIN has been that organizations throughout the state have now been able to participate in quarterly networking opportunities with

related, shared monthly resources. Organizations can also access the services of consultant, Julia Gittleman, PhD for planning, evaluation, and program development support **27 youth arts organizations statewide** (over more than 100 sessions), received pro bono technical support covering topics including survey design, logic model design, data analysis, and reporting. These organizations represented considerable geographic diversity (including organizations in Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester and Melrose) and were of varying sizes and maturity.

In FY26, building on the [success of YAIN](#) over these past five years, we will continue to offer the resources and the access to best practices and innovations equitably across Massachusetts with the continued investment of \$36,000. The support of the Youth Arts Impact Network in FY26 will help us to strengthen our partnership with EdVestors, and the 500+ community of Creative Youth Development practitioners, funders, and alumni who are part of the network.

This network is especially important given the current federal administration's policies and executive orders that are creating heightened pressures and uncertainties on nonprofits, especially those in the arts and culture sector.

Poetry Out Loud. Again, this year, we will be contracting with the Huntington Theatre Company to implement the national Poetry Out Loud program on behalf of Mass Cultural Council here in Massachusetts.

POL is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation. **The NEA fully funds this program with a specific dedicated grant** and in FY26, the amount has remained at \$25,000, the same as FY25. The contract is designated for the program by the NEA in their grant to us. The Huntington Theatre Company raises more than \$50,000 in additional funds to carry out the program, which has been one of the five largest programs in the country for the last twelve years and the largest in New England as well. In FY25 they celebrated their [20th anniversary](#) and 157,000 students participated in 1550 schools. We are proud to partner with the Huntington Theater on this successful project.

Creative Experiences

(Agenda Item 9(a))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Sara Glidden, Lisa Simmons, Amy Chu, Kalyn King, Timothea Pham,

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: FY26 Creative Experiences

Summary. This memo presents the funding scenario for the Mass Cultural Council Creative Experiences program in FY26. The Mass Cultural Council's FY26 Spending Plan calls for an allocation of **\$3,350,000** to support organizations (including schools) to fund festivals, projects, residencies, and other cultural activities in the arts, humanities, and sciences. Additionally, The National Endowment for the Arts is offering supplementary funding of **\$25,000** to support projects celebrating America250. The total amount provided to support experiences is **\$3,375,000**. This program combines the previously separate, [Festivals & Projects](#) and [Creative Projects for Schools](#) into a single program. These grants are meant to expand access to a wide range of cultural experiences and support a program's sustainability. This year, the Creative Experiences program will grant \$2,500 or \$5,000 to eligible applicants. After receiving a total of 1,557 grant applications, the program will seek to fund 708 grants.

Applicant Eligibility. Eligibility is intentionally broad and includes nonprofits, for-profits, schools, municipal entities, and unincorporated organizations applying with fiscal agents. Based on agency-wide discussions and decisions, ineligible entities include single-member LLCs, Cultural Districts receiving funding in FY25, and FY25 YouthReach and Cultural Investment Portfolio grantees; additionally, eligible fiscal agents, foreign LLCs, and foreign corporations must be registered to do business in Massachusetts.

Program Eligibility. Eligible programs will include experiences that incorporate the arts, humanities, or sciences and contribute to the cultural vitality of Massachusetts by being publicly available or intentionally serving a segment of the general public, rather than benefiting a private individual or group.

"Publicly available" means open to the general public through paid or free admission, while serving a portion of the public may include specific geographic communities, schools, cultural or tribal groups, or populations requiring accommodations such as K-12 students, seniors, incarcerated individuals, or people with disabilities.

The programmatic activity must occur at least 50% between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, with a project budget equal to or exceeding the requested grant amount of either \$2,500 or \$5,000. The experience must take place in

Massachusetts, whether in-person or virtually, and be accessible to people with disabilities. Activities cannot include inherently religious practices such as worship, instruction, or proselytization, nor can they support events for political candidates. Finally, the project must not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, age, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Funding Priorities. Grants of \$2,500 or \$5,000 will be awarded based on the number of eligible applicants and the prioritization categories listed below.

- First-time applicants or applicants that have not received funding from Mass Cultural Council in the last three fiscal years.
- Applicants that self-identify as “BIPOC-Centered,” according to Mass Cultural Council’s definition or MA k-12 DESE recognized schools that are BIPOC Majority.
- Applicants/projects located in cities and towns that Mass Cultural Council has defined as “under-resourced communities.”
- Applicants participating in the agency’s Card to Culture programs.
- Projects/events that are free to the public.
- Projects/events that significantly incorporate the arts, humanities, and sciences.

In addition to the prioritization criteria established for the program in FY25, the following funding priorities from the FY25 Creative Projects for Schools grant program have been incorporated:

- **Experiences/Activities** that hire and compensate Massachusetts artists, humanists and/or scientists.

We added the following new funding priorities:

- **Experiences/Activities** where the primary purpose is creating, presenting, or providing services in the arts, humanities, or sciences.
- **Applicants** that have only received a total of \$2,500 or less in grant funding over the past three fiscal years (FY25, FY24, FY23), which is equivalent to one *Festivals & Projects* grant.

These funding priorities are intended to support the agency’s advancement goals by centering the arts, humanities, and sciences, emphasizing the fair compensation of cultural workers, and applying a more nuanced equity and inclusion lens to applicants’ past funding histories.

Equitable Distribution. Ties for the final awards were broken using County and then an applicant's Official City, to ensure equitable distribution of funds by geography.

FY26 Program. The Mass Cultural Council's FY26 Creative Experiences grant program is currently in its first cycle. The FY26 grant cycle opened on March 4, 2025, with an application deadline of April 30, 2025. We received 1,557 applications for this new grant program—a strong response that reflects continued interest from the field, although this represents a small decrease compared to the combined total of **1,340 Festivals & Projects and 503 Creative Projects for Schools applications in FY25.**
Eligible applicants,

Of the **1,557 applications received:**

1. 602 (39%) of the organizations have not received funding from us in the last three years, including previously unsuccessful applicants and new applicants.
2. 341 (22%) of the organizations have only received a total of \$2,500 in grant funding in the last three fiscal years (FY25, FY24, FY23).
3. 425 (27%) are from BIPOC-Centered organizations/BIPOC majority schools.
4. 660 (42%) would fund programs taking place in a priority community.
5. 1,299 (83%) applicants are participating in the Card to Culture program or providing activities/experiences that are free.

Of the **708 funded organizations:**

1. 470 (66%) of the organizations have not received funding from us in the last three years, including previously unsuccessful applicants and new applicants. An additional 36 (5%) of the organizations have only received a total of \$2,500 in grant funding in the last three fiscal years (FY25, FY24, FY23).
2. 367 (52%) are from BIPOC-Centered organizations/BIPOC majority schools.
3. 320 (45%) would fund programs taking place in a priority community.
4. 608 (86%) applicants are participating in the Card to Culture program or providing activities/experiences that are free
5. 691 (98%) applicants have the primary purpose of creating, presenting, or providing services in the arts, humanities, or sciences.
6. 641 (91%) applicants are hiring and compensating Massachusetts artists, humanists and/or scientists

92% of eligible applications from BIPOC-Centered organizations or BIPOC-majority K-12 schools are recommended for funding.

83% of eligible applications from organizations that haven't received funding from us in the last three years are recommended for funding.

Recommended Grants. Of 1,557 applications, 55 are determined to be ineligible for funding. Of 708 applications recommended for funding, we are recommending 30 of them receive Holds. Organizations that do not resolve the reason for their hold by late Fall will have their grant reverted. The number of Holds may change as final reports are completed, as any FY25 Festivals and Projects and Creative Projects for Schools grantees with outstanding reports will not receive funding for FY26, per the guidelines.

A list of the 708 grantees is included in **Appendix F**.

To the extent that not all the \$3,350,000 set aside can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

The program is jointly managed by Timothea Pham from the Communities team, Kalyn King from the Cultural Investment Portfolio team, and Amy Chu, from the Artists Team. Application reviewers included Jenifer Lawless, Lisa Simmons, Dan Blask, Amy Chu, Timothea Pham, Kalyn King, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong, Sommers Smith, and Charles Baldwin.

America250 Partnership Funding Opportunity. To commemorate the United States' 250th anniversary in 2026, the NEA is offering optional supplementary funding of \$25,000 to each State Arts Agency through the FY25 Partnership Agreement.

Mass Cultural Council has opted to accept this funding through the Creative Experiences grant program and will distribute it as subgrants to organizations for projects that celebrate the semi-quincentennial. Eligible activities may focus solely on America250 or incorporate related themes into broader arts programming—such as showcasing American artists, creating commemorative works, or offering educational initiatives. Projects must take place during calendar years 2025–2026. Direct grants to individuals are not permitted. The Creative Experiences team will support selected grantees with an overview or direct guidance on the grant acceptance process following award announcements.

A list of the six recommended America250 grantees is also included in **Appendix F**. Should any of the recommended grantees decline the NEA award, we will offer the funds to the next eligible 250th Anniversary related project(s).

UP Innovation Fund

(Agenda Item 9(b))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
 Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Charles Baldwin
 Dt: August 6, 2025
 Re: UP Innovation Fund

Summary. The Innovation Fund is a financial award to organizations that have previously obtained from the Agency an UP Designation. The UP Innovation Grant enables these organizations to enact "Access"- foundational, sustainable, and aspirational. In FY26 we recommend a program allocation of **\$465,000** to make up to 93 \$5,000 awards. This represents a \$5,000 decrease in funding from what was approved in FY25 due to an organization leaving the program.

Background. Between 2015 and 2022, organizations applied for UP Designation, either directly or via the Innovation Learning Network (ILN), earning a 5-year UP Designation status. This status entitled them to apply for the UP Award (\$10k unrestricted grant for achieving Accessibility, determined by peers and panelists), the Innovation Fund (\$3k for accessible practice development), and the LEAD stipend (\$1k for staff professional development at the LEAD Conference). However, not all UP Organizations could receive funding through these programs.

In FY23, UP Designation applications were halted to develop a Disability Equity Plan that would enhance the efficacy, growth, and sustainability of organizational learning, advance relationships with Deaf and/or Disabled artists, and to address internal policies and practices. Due to the pause, we have allowed all UP Organizations to maintain their UP Designated status, even those beyond their original 5-years. Once the Designation is redesigned (FY26) the existing UP Designated Organizations will go through the new process for their redesignation.

Also, in FY23, we collapsed those smaller UP grant programs into the single Innovation Fund program. The Innovation Fund became an annual grant available to all UP Designated Organizations for the duration of their Designation if they continued to meet the program's reporting requirements. Of the 96 original UP Designated organizations, due to closures and/or internal capacities, 92 organizations remain eligible for the \$5k grant.

Monthly UP office hours provide continued education and support on legal obligations, technical assistance, access planning and implementation.

As recommended by the Agency's d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan, a Disability Advisory Committee has been formed to assist with determining the characteristics of UP Designation (what makes an organization successfully

accessible). Data from INF grantee Annual Reports is one strategy towards measuring the impact and sustainability of the Agency's investment.

FY26 Awards. Organizations with UP Designation were expected to complete the [Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment](#) in FY25. In FY26 they will be required to submit their organization's Accessibility Plan to Mass Cultural Council. A list of UP Organizations that will receive funding can be found in **Appendix G**.

To the extent not all the \$465,000 set aside can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

Equity, Inclusion, and Access Grants

(Agenda Item 9(c))

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner

Dt: August 6, 2025

Re: Equity, inclusion, and Access Grants

Overview. In addition to folding equity and access into all the agency's grant programs, we are pleased to present for your review recommendations for funding an additional grant that promotes equity, inclusion, and access.

FY25 Recommendations

Organization	Initiative	Grant
Open Door Arts	Arts and Culture Accessibility Resource Hub	\$100,000

\$100,000

Arts and Culture Accessibility Resource Hub

In FY25, Mass Cultural Council's [d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan \(FY25-28\)](#) called for the agency to collaborate with a specialized vendor, other agencies and service orgs, on the deployment, revision, scaling and launch of the Mass Cultural Council's Universal/Inclusive Design learning program, called the Innovation and Learning Network (ILN), in order to reach hundreds of organizations and individuals in the creative sector using a universal design for learning framework and a dynamic mix of online delivery and small group/peer group discussion opportunities.

Background. Historically, the [Innovation and Learning Network](#) (ILN), was a series of professional development workshops on Universal Design and accessibility practices run directly by Mass Cultural Council staff, collaborative partner organizations and hired consultants. The ILN facilitated the development of a Community of Practice; examining and activating physical, digital, educational, and social systems. Originally it consisted of 5 to 6 in-person day-long learning sessions held at cultural organizations and became an online service during the pandemic. In FY21 and FY22 the ILN consisted of a series of webinars, meetings, evaluations, and audits to steward the implementation of an access plan for cultural organizations. Program activities were designed and delivered in partnership with the National Center for Accessible Media, the

Institute for Human Centered Design, Partners for Youth with Disabilities, and Open Door Arts.

Originally, this amazing, in-depth learning opportunity was offered to 10 to 13 organizations a year. The goal of the agency was to make this opportunity available more broadly to as many organizations as possible. The program was paused in FY23 to develop the d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan and to look for a partner to assist in our goal to reach a much larger number of constituents and ensure that all Massachusetts Cultural organizations have access to this excellent, in-depth learning to promote and improve accessibility at their organization for people with disabilities.

In FY24 we awarded Open Door Arts a \$20,000 grant to support some very important tools that support the [d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan \(FY25-28\)](#) plan, specifically our goals to create/promote shared "accessibility in the arts" language, and a definition/rubric that sets clear, measurable criteria and benchmarks for organizations in the creative sector. This rubric may suggest progressive levels of achievement, aiding organizations in understanding auditing and improving their accessibility work. The tools which are already available are:

1. The Arts and Culture Legal Responsibilities Identification Tool:

- Consists of 12 yes or no questions to help organizations identify which accessibility laws apply to them based on characteristics
- Creates customized report that outlines the laws, regulations and their responsibilities as well as links to resources
- Recommended as a precursor to the Self-Assessment tool

2. The Arts and Culture Glossary:

- Consists of 90 terms related to accessibility
- Includes brief definitions and links for resources, templates, examples, etc.
- Directly linked with self-identification and self-assessment tools

3. The Arts and Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment:

- Is a Comprehensive electronic 300 question self-assessment
- Creates a customized report synthesizing responses and providing step by step instructions and templates to create an Accessibility Plan
- Supplemental tools include glossary and self-identification tool, external links, and resources
- Allows for large scale data collection and research

We have promoted resources and tools to the cultural sector in FY25, added a funding priority for Operating Grants for Organizations that completed the Self-Assessment, and we required UP Designated Organizations to complete a self-

assessment. We also see these tools as a key part of our long-term work on the Disability Plan. Building off this strong foundation, Open Door Arts has developed the framework and model for an Arts and Culture Accessibility Resource Hub:

- Website containing comprehensive centralized information, resources, rosters and training related to accessibility for arts and culture organizations
- Content and structure are aligned with the Self-Assessment
- Includes:
 - Informational content, introductory videos, resources
 - Rosters of disabled artists, user/experts, access consultants, and service providers
 - Asynchronous training modules with assessments
 - Peer networks and cohort learning opportunities

We see huge potential in the Hub to serve as a central place for organizations to get access to the ILN style learning we have been offering. We would like to serve as a foundational partner to help establish the Hub to the benefit of the Massachusetts cultural sector and to the people with disabilities they serve. Open Door Arts has provided a budget that includes the projected costs for the build of the Hub website (main content, resources, rosters, etc.) as well as 8 asynchronous video training modules. The expenses reflect the 18-month estimated time of completion, with both the content and the training modules being developed simultaneously. The goal is to launch the Hub in January 2026.

Request. We are recommending a **\$100,000** investment in the project in FY26 to assist in the launch of the project and incorporation into the evolution of our Universal Participation Initiative.