



Power of culture

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

MONDAY, AUGUST 11, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Ché Anderson, Co-Chair
Diane Asadorian Masters
Rhonda Anderson
Anika Lopes
Marc Carroll – ex officio
Jo-Ann Davis – ex officio

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
Carolyn Cole, Special Projects Manager for Advancement
Erik Holmgren, Manager of Strategic Partnerships & Advancement
Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff

Co-Chair Ché Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:03am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

Ché then asked Committee Members if they'd reviewed the minutes from their last meeting held on May 15, 2025. If they had, he would look for a motion and a second to approve those minutes. Diane Asadorian Masters moved to approve the minutes; Rhonda Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Committee Co-Chair Iván Espinoza-Madrigal and Committee Members Petrina Martin, Allyce Najimy, and David Sun Kong were absent it was unanimously

Prepared on 9/12/25

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2025 Advancement Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Ché then gave his Co-Chair's report stating that there are many questions and some confusion within the cultural sector due to ongoing federal changes, but it's important to note the continued cross-sector initiatives underway. Massachusetts state government remains strongly supportive of the sector, and we're seeing new inroads, partners, and outlets emerge. This reflects both the strength of the Commonwealth and the important work Mass Cultural Council staff are leading. Ché then asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Michael shared that as part of the Agency's participation in the Massachusetts STEM Advisory Council, it is helping to establish a new "STEAM" focus and re-naming. While the STEM Council doesn't have full statewide reach, it does have strong K-12 engagement through the statewide Graduation Council of which Michael is an appointed member. Michael thanked Program Officer Käthe Swaback who has been representing the Agency at Graduation Council meetings when he is unable to attend; making sure arts and culture are part of the conversation. Increasingly, creativity is being recognized as a key element in defining what skills a Massachusetts graduate should have.

Michael went on to share that at next week's Council meeting, Council Members will hear from MITx, which is in the midst of filming content for a planned January launch of its arts entrepreneurship course. In parallel, we've begun conversations with key colleges about hosting a summit—or potentially a series—focused on how arts colleges can better integrate business and civics into their curricula. A small planning committee is forming for that work, with sessions anticipated in the fall and again in the spring. Early partners include funders as well as advocacy and policy leaders.

Finally, we had a great conversation with the Monica Tibbits-Nutt, MA Secretary of Transportation, and a pilot with Massport has just launched to bring live music into Logan Airport. Michael stopped there, as Manager of Advancement & Strategic Partnerships Erik Holmgren would give a longer update on the Agency's Advancement work later in the meeting.

Ché asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her Public Affairs report.

Bethann is excited to share that in FY26 the Agency will change the way it convenes stakeholders. Many Committee Members have graciously joined us at program-by-program convenings and celebrations in the past. Beginning in FY26, instead of gathering by program, we will host regional convenings that bring together grantees and partners across programs, disciplines, and communities. We're aligning these with the state's tourism regions and the regional groupings used by the Communities team. The plan is to hold a series of regional celebrations in both the fall and spring, ensuring that every region of the Commonwealth has a moment to come together. In the fall, we'll celebrate the investments approved in August—meaning larger gatherings, bigger numbers to celebrate, and a dynamic mix of grantees represented. Bethann and the Public Affairs team look forward to working with the Committee as they finalize the schedule and messaging, and to create events that truly reflect the impact of our investments across Massachusetts.

Ché thanked Bethann for her update and for organizing opportunities to celebrate wins. He then asked Erik Holmgren for his report on the Agency's Advancement efforts.

Erik shared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the work and gave a presentation; he was joined by Special Projects Manager for Advancement Carolyn Cole. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Following the presentation Ché thanked Erik and Carolyn and remarked that while Advancement is something they have in their job titles, it is truly everyone's work to break down doors and advance the cultural sector.

A brief discussion followed. Chair Marc Carroll expressed his curiosity about the anticipated impact of this work and how the team sees it influencing behavior. Changing habits can be difficult, he asked Erik for his thoughts on how real behavior change might take shape.

Erik noted that changing existing behavior is often more difficult than creating new habits. Drawing from long-term education issues at the Statewide Graduation Council, members observed that progress is made when people feel empowered and experience early success. To that end, the field should be set up for achievable early wins. Two approaches were identified:

1. **Staff Presence and Support:** Staff should accompany the field to some meetings, extend invitations, and help ensure participation, particularly at the local level where individuals may be less inclined to engage on their own.
2. **Messaging and Communication:** In communications with the field, it is important to consistently emphasize the call to action—encouraging involvement and ensuring representation in decision-making spaces.

Erik also shared that FY26 efforts will focus on building staff capacity and confidence, with an opportunity to deepen the work in FY27. Partners such as MASSCreative and Mass Humanities, as well as lessons learned from work in Maryland, were identified as valuable resources.

Michael emphasized the importance of recognizing potential federal shifts as emerging challenges. Two key points were raised:

1. The sector must learn to prioritize its own sustainability; to put the oxygen mask on itself first. Advocacy has often focused narrowly on funding, which only supports a small portion of the work; government can also provide regulatory and structural support.
2. The sector is not consistently trained in entrepreneurship, unlike other sectors that maintain strong, intrinsic connections with government. Building this capacity will require behavioral shifts over time.

Michael noted that in Maryland (where he led cultural organizations previously) it was difficult for candidates to be elected without an arts platform. While this is not yet the case in Massachusetts, advancing toward that level of integration should be a priority.

Dave added that it is encouraging to see the sector attend meetings and events such as those offered by Chambers of Commerce and to know that they deserve to be represented at business-focused events.

Vice Chari Jo-Ann Davis congratulated Erik and Carolyn for their innovative, groundbreaking work in this incredibly difficult environment and thanked them for their detailed presentation.

Rhonda Anderson thanked the team for the deeper dive on Advancement work noting that it feels essential. She appreciates the framing around knocking on doors and inviting people into rooms. In her own work in the health sector, she has often described it as dragging chairs to the table and sometimes even building the table herself. She mentioned Cheryl Cromwell, a health equity strategist she has learned a lot from. Cheryl's expertise could be valuable, especially as opioid relief remains such an urgent issue. Indigenous communities are among the most deeply affected by the opioid crisis, yet continue to face significant barriers to culturally relevant care. Rhonda inquired if the Agency has any partners in the prescriptions or health sector who are specifically providing for Indigenous community members. For Indigenous Peoples approaches to health look different. Healing often involves being on the land and receiving culturally relevant teachings. There isn't a word for "art" in the same way—as it isn't a separate category. Art is about where we come from and who we are. It's core, essential, a returning to self. That's why it's so meaningful to see the artwork already visible in places like MassDOT website and in T stations. Rhonda would love to see more Indigenous art represented in these public spaces, especially as we remember that we are all on Indigenous land.

Michael thanked Rhonda for her feedback and asked the team to strategize on regions where large numbers of Indigenous Peoples reside and connect them with Art Pharmacy.

There were no further questions and the end of the agenda had been reached. Ché, as Co-Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:02am.