

Posted 8/13/25



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COUNCIL MEETING BOOK

ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-SIXTH MEETING

OF

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

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ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-SIXTH MEETING OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025
9:00-11:00 AM

BROADCAST MEETING

MEETING WILL BE LIVESTREAMED AT

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/LIVE/L9YDDT_4SZM](https://www.youtube.com/live/L9YDDT_4SZM)

MEETING MATERIALS WILL BE POSTED ONLINE AT

[HTTPS://MASSCULTURALCOUNCIL.ORG/ABOUT/BOARD/](https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/board/)

UNDER "AUGUST 19, 2025 COUNCIL MEETING"

AGENDA

VOTE

1. Call to Order- Open Meeting Law Notice
2. Guest Speaker – Dr. Ben Shields and Jenny Larios Berlin, MIT Sloan School of Management regarding arts & entrepreneurship curriculum.
3. Minutes of 165th Council Meeting & Special April 22, 2025 Meeting X
4. **Chair Report**
 - a) Welcome new Council Member
 - b) Calendar of Upcoming meetings
 - c) Committees

5. ***Executive Office Report***

- a) Executive Director Report
- b) Advancement Update
- c) Equity Progress Report

6. ***Public Affairs Report***

- a) Legislative Update
- b) Department Updates

7. ***FY 26 Spending Plan General Presentation***

- a) PowerPoint Presentation on FY26 Spending Plan

8. ***FY26 Conflict of Interest Notifications***

9. ***Program Operations Report***

- a) Department Updates
- b) FY 26 Grant Recommendations

c) **PROGRAMS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON GRANT PROPOSALS**

d) Advancement

- i. Mass Humanities
- ii. New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)
- iii. MASSCreative
- iv. MassPort Artist Program
- v. Arts Benefit Programs
- vi. National Endowment for the Arts-Arts & Health
- vii. MIT Sloan School of Management

e) Organizations

- i. Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations
(Appendix A & Appendix B)

f) Communities

- i. Cultural District Investment Grants
- ii. Local Cultural Councils
- iii. Tribal Cultural Councils

g) Arts Education & Youth

- i. YouthReach

- ii. Creative Youth Development and Education Grants
 - h) Equity and Inclusion
 - i. Creative Experiences
 - ii. UP Innovation Fund Grants
 - iii. Equity, Inclusion, and Access Grants
10. ***Business Operations Report***
- a) FY 26 Spending Plan Summary
 - b) **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION ON SPENDING PLAN**
 - c) Approval of FY26 Budget and Spending Plan and Grant Recommendations **X**
 - d) Other Business Operations Updates
11. Adjourn



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

RESOLUTIONS

Section 3- Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Sixty-Fifth Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council and the Special meeting of Mass Cultural Council held on April 22, 2025, all in the form presented .

Section 9- FY26 Spending Plan and Program Recommendations

WHEREAS, the General Court of the Massachusetts State Legislature has appropriated, and the Governor has signed into law, a budget of \$26,045,152 plus an additional \$930,000 in earmarks to the Mass Cultural Council for FY26;

WHEREAS Mass Cultural Council staff has presented a draft FY26 budget and spending plan to the Executive Committee at its meeting on August 6, 2025 (the "Plan");

WHEREAS the Executive Committee reviewed the Plan and recommended that it be forwarded to the Council for approval; and

WHEREAS Council staff presented the Plan to the Mass Cultural Council at its meeting on August 19, 2025 (the "Council Meeting").

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: To approve the Plan as recommended by the Executive Committee and presented to the Council Meeting subject to the further approvals of the individual grant and program recommendations below; and

WHEREAS Council staff presented the FY26 grants recommendations to the Programs Committee at its meeting on August 6, 2025 ("Programs Committee Meeting");

WHEREAS the Programs Committee recommended to the full Council the allocation of the grants and approval of the programs presented at the Programs Committee Meeting;

WHEREAS the Programs Committee reviewed procedures of grant allocations and recommended that the Council approve the same;

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

Section 9(d)(i)

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

Section 9(d)(ii)

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

Section 9(d)(iii)

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to Mass Creative for \$30,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(d)(iv)

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to MassPort for \$5,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(d)(v)

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

Section 9(d)(vi)

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

Section 9(e)(i)

RESOLVED: To endorse 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 new Operating Grants for Organizations as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(f)(i)

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$870,000 in Cultural District grants as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(f)(ii)

RESOLVED: To make allocations to the Local Cultural Councils totaling \$5,700,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(f)(iii)

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$103,950 in allocations to Tribal Cultural Councils as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(g)(i)

RESOLVED: To approve grant allocations to YouthReach program in the amount of \$1,870,000, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(g)(ii)

RESOLVED: To approve a grant of \$36,000 to the Youth Arts Impact Network with EdVestors and \$25,000 in support of the NEA-funded Poetry Out Loud

program as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(h)(i)

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

Section 9(h)(ii)

RESOLVED: To approve \$465,000 in UP Innovation Fund Grants, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 9(h)(iii)

RESOLVED: To approve a \$100,000 grant to Open Door Arts for the Arts and Culture Accessibility Resource Hub, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

General

RESOLVED: To approve the ability of staff to re-allocate unused grant funds for any program to any other FY26 approved grant program (whether approved at this meeting or a future FY26 Council meeting) as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.



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

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-SIXTY FIFTH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Rhonda Anderson
Simone Early
Cecil Barron Jensen
Diane Asadorian Masters
Anika Lopes
Ashley Occhino
Petrina Martin
Ellice Patterson
Mark Snyder
Julie Wake

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Christian Kelly, Carmen Plazas, Erik Holmgren, Summer Confuorto, Dan Blask, and Carolyn Cole; Town of Franklin Director of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy Cory Shea.

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:08AM and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

After David read the statement, the Chair welcomed Council Members, staff, and guests to the meeting. He then invited the meeting's guest speaker, Town of Franklin Director of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy Cory Shea, to give her presentation. Cory. The Town of Franklin recently received state approval to use a portion of its opioid settlement funds to pilot an arts prescriptions program. Cory spoke about why this work was chosen, what went into getting the funds in place, and what the potential is.

Prepared on 3/31/25

Following the presentation, Ashley Occhino asked Cory if there is an arts and culture plan the town is following. Cory hopes to have a master plan for arts and culture within the next two years; right now, she is “flying the plane while she builds it” and gathering feedback from the community on what an arts and culture plan should look like. Cecil Barron Jensen asked how Cory will measure the success of the arts prescriptions program. Cory explained that Art Pharmacy has a method for measuring the impact of the work.

The Chair thanked Cory for her presentation and the work she is doing in Franklin. He noted that on March 5th there is a community discussion about arts prescriptions in Franklin that Michael and Manager of Strategic Partnerships & Advancement Erik Holmgren will participate in. Cory will share a link to more information about the event.

The Chair then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the 164th Council Meeting included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve them. Mark Snyder moved to approve the minutes and Anika Lopes seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Secretary Yvonne Hao, David Kong, Emily Bramhall, and Donna Haghighat were absent, it was

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the November 13, 2024 Council Meeting in the form presented.

The Chair then gave his report. He shared that he was in Lowell at the Merrimack Repertory Theatre for the recent Cultural Districts Investment Grants celebration. He thanked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner and Public Relations & Events Manager Christian Kelly for organizing the event and Merrimack Repertory Theatre Executive Director Courtney Sale for hosting. The event was well attended, and everyone was incredibly appreciative of the Agency’s support.

The Chair asked Council Members to mark their calendars for April 30th—Creative Sector Day at the Massachusetts State House. He then asked Bethann to share more information about the day. Bethann shared that this is the largest advocacy day for the sector on Beacon Hill, and Mass Cultural Council is a key partner alongside MASSCreative, Mass Humanities, MAPC, MassArt, and many others. Last year, the event coincided with the Governor’s H2 budget filing, where she announced an increase in the Agency’s funding. The day features a two-hour formal program in the Great Hall, followed by attendees engaging with legislators throughout the State House. Expect performances and artistic displays on the Grand Staircase, and a vibrant celebration of the creative community. It’s a remarkable opportunity to showcase how engaged and essential the work of the creative community is. If Council Members would like help connecting with their legislators, Bethann is happy to assist. Also, the Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council is targeting April 30th to present recommendations to the Healey-Driscoll Administration.

The Chair continued his report sharing that yesterday, the Executive Committee met to discuss Executive Director Michael Bobbitt’s compensation. A clarification issue came up during the meeting, but there was not enough time to resolve it before today’s meeting. The Executive Committee has requested the necessary information to make the clarification, and as soon as they have it, will reschedule the discussion for another meeting.

The Chair asked Council Member Julie Wake, who also serves on the Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council (CPDAC), for an update on the work of the CPDAC. Julie shared that the CPDAC met for the second time in Amherst at the Yiddish Book Center on January 22. The members of the CPDAC had previously been divided into four focus areas: workforce, education, and talent; infrastructure for cultural spaces; economic impact; and community support. The four groups each worked together to develop four policy recommendations per area. The leaders of each group presented their findings at the gathering in January, sparking a great discussion. The recommendations were then evaluated and prioritized. A team from the Secretary of Economic Development's office will now review and refine these priorities before sending them back to the group for further consideration. Michael sent a letter to Secretary Hao's office outlining Mass Cultural Council's priorities. Julie believes Mass Cultural Council should take the lead in driving these efforts once the recommendations are determined.

The Chair then asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael began by sharing that on February 3 Mass Cultural Council was thrilled to join the Governor and Lieutenant Governor at the State House for the announcement and signing of an Executive Order establishing a Massachusetts state Poet Laureate. Michael will serve as Chair of a Nominating Committee which will make recommendations to the Governor on applicants for the position. Recommendations for that Nominating Committee have been shared with the Appointees office. Council Members will hear more about the plans and timeline for the Poet Laureate during the Program Operations update later in the meeting.

The annual budget-building process has commenced. Bethann and Michael were at the State House yesterday and had a very positive meeting with Senate Ways & Means Chairman Michael Rodrigues– more meetings are scheduled for the coming weeks. Bethann will share full details on the budget in her Public Affairs and Legislative update.

Other recent meetings have included a conversation regarding the Live Theater Tax Credit with our colleagues at MOTT and a very positive meeting with the Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) where we discussed the Historical Curatorship program and other potential collaborations. Later today Dave and Michael are excited to meet with Navjeet Bal the new President & CEO of MassDevelopment.

Michael visited the New Bedford Art Museum late last week and will visit the Harvard Art Museums this coming Friday. Earlier this week he attended a meeting of the Berkshires Arts & Cultural Alliance held at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge. This is a group of 10 large cultural organizations in the Berkshires. The meeting yesterday went very well. It helped by starting off with the results of the asset inventory map. The group was blown away by the intel and shocked by the growth of applicants that Mass Cultural Council has seen. The conversation morphed into the need for the gathered organizations and arts organizations in general to operationalize advocacy – now more than ever – and to expand BACA to include all of the Berkshires arts organizations, for profits, and generators.

Michael recently posted a message to the field on the Agency's blog. The post clarified this year's grantmaking and reaffirmed our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in light of ongoing changes and developments within the federal

government. Michael is planning to post one to two times each month moving forward and believes the focus of his next post will be exactly what he discussed with the Berkshires group – the need for operationalized advocacy, engagement, and a unified voice and strong presence from the cultural sector in any and all rooms.

Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon will send Council Members the full list of scheduled meetings and events for March in the coming days, but looking ahead at next week, Michael along the Advancement team are heading to Dennis for a tour of the Cape Cod Center for the Arts and a discussion on the possible future establishment of a Cultural District in Dennis. Michael is excited that Julie Wake will be part of this visit.

The Advancement Team has been focused on building the infrastructure for the new Advancement work at the Agency. Before drafting initial plans to define, communicate, implement, and evaluate this work, each program team was consulted to understand their vision of success, their unique collective assets, and their needs.

CivicMoxie was hired as the consultant to lead the redesign of the Cultural Districts Initiative. Fifty-five Cultural Districts have been surveyed, there have been 10 Partner Interviews, staff Interviews, seven focus groups, and a dynamic Statewide Cross-Sector Task Force representing 24+ state agencies, quasi-governmental offices, and nonprofit entities. Staff is getting together internally to start to look at the framework that has been proposed by CivicMoxie.

Arts Prescription Partnerships are growing:

- 430 Organizations in network, 401 prescriptions written, 77% attendance rate, and 126 arts organizations referred
- United Health Care national corporate office is supporting expansion
- Two dual eligible Medicare/Medicaid plans have incorporated social prescription into their 2025 plans
- Opioid Recovery funds in use in Franklin Massachusetts as you heard earlier.
- Department of Public Health program in Springfield targeting seniors of color is under development
- Dana Farber Center for Integrative Medicine is in talks with Art Pharmacy

Michael then shared some new data on the Impact of Social Prescription from Canada --- A savings of \$4.43 is achieved for every dollar invested in social prescribing.

Additionally, estimated savings include:

- \$296M savings in annual costs from reduced hospital admissions and emergency visits
- \$114M in annual cost savings from reduced primary care visits
- \$59.9M annual increase in employment income for youth with depressive symptoms
- 16,900 fewer cases of coronary artery disease
- 2,000 fewer cases of avoidable deaths.

He then gave a brief Equity progress report noting that a full report is included in Council Members' meeting materials.

- Staff is finalizing scopes of work for both the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee and the d/Deaf & Disability Advisory Committee. Invitations will go out to potential members in the coming weeks.

- Public Affairs continues its successful media partnership with *El Planeta* to ensure proactive external communications and outreach to Spanish speaking potential grantees, promoting both our funding opportunities and the investments made in this community by the Agency.
- In December the Agency hosted a Spotlight Series webinar for members of the creative and cultural sector with Open Door Arts to promote their Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment tool
- The Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Cultural Council announced their inaugural grant cycle with 8 grantees and plans for their own council programming
- This spring all staff will take part in an Anti-Ableist training as part of our continued internal learning.

When Michael finished Ellice Patterson shared that she attended a meeting with Michael at Converse last month and wondered if there was any follow-up from that conversation. Michael shared that this was a meeting with partners on the Agency's Cultural Asset Inventory project and that there was no follow up just yet.

Mark Snyder noted Michael's mention of the Agency's outreach to Spanish-speaking media and asked if there were efforts being made to reach other outlets given that there are 38 languages spoken in Massachusetts.

Bethann thanked Mark for his question and shared that as a state agency, Mass Cultural Council is legally required to make materials available in any language requested by a constituent. To ensure accessibility, the Agency has a translation service in place. Anytime a new program or application is announced, Mass Cultural Council prominently includes instructions on how to request translations. The Public Affairs team has partnered with *El Planeta*—now in our second year of collaboration—which has been highly engaged with our work. They've also explored partnerships with other targeted media outlets, though nothing has been finalized yet. A few years ago, the Agency received an earmark to create a program for AAPI cultural organizations, during which we ensured materials were available in multiple languages online. The Agency continues to work hard to meet people where they are through our external communications, whether in writing, audio, or translated formats. For info sessions, the Agency provides American Sign Language and Spanish interpretation. While we don't receive frequent translation requests, we are always prepared to respond when needed.

There were no further questions pertaining to Michael's Executive Director's report. The Chair asked Bethann to give her Public Affairs and Legislative report.

Bethann shared that we are in the early days of the legislative session, with the House and Senate working on rules. Committees can't be named until the rules are finalized, so we're waiting to see who will chair the Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development. The Governor's budget was released in January, and Mass Cultural Council requested \$28 million—level with last year's ask. While last year's funding fell slightly short, we made progress, and if approved, this would be the highest amount we've ever received. That said, this will be a different kind of budget year given the state of the economy, federal government dynamics, and the legislature's cautious

approach. H1 was favorable, providing slightly over level funding—\$150K more than the current budget, bringing the total to \$26,045,152.

Michael and Bethann had the opportunity to meet with Senate Ways & Means Chair Michael Rodrigues, who was supportive but offered some caveats about the budget process. The Senate is expected to begin debates in May. We continue to stay in close communication with the House Ways and Means Committee and our usual legislative partners. A budget hearing is anticipated in March (date TBD), followed by House action in April.

On the legislative front, we're working on two key bills. The first, working with Senator Paul Mark, aims to amend the Cultural Facilities Fund statute which currently states that municipal facilities must be a certain number of years old and a certain size to be eligible for funding. This is a barrier to many facilities; the bill will seek to change that language. On the House side, there's an ongoing conversation about making a clear statement in support of STEM to STEAM. The proposal involves a technical correction to state statutes—updating three instances where "STEM" is referenced to instead say "STEAM." This change doesn't require funding but serves as an important symbolic step that could pave the way for more impactful conversations about the cultural sector.

The Agency is also gearing up for the launch of the Cultural Asset Inventory during the week of March 10 and there are several events at the State House this spring:

- **April 15:** celebration of the 20th anniversary of Poetry Out Loud
- **April 30:** Creative Sector Day
- **May 19:** Celebration for Grants for Creative Individuals recipients

There were no questions for Bethann. The Chair asked David to give the Business Operations report.

David explained that he was giving the report on behalf of Senior Director of Business Operations and Chief Financial Officer Catherine Cheng-Anderson who is on vacation. Seven months into the fiscal year, the Agency is on track with its spending. We are aware of developments at the federal level, particularly regarding funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Mass Cultural Council receives \$1.2 million from the NEA and had been waiting for the final \$400K. That funding has now arrived, meaning all expected FY25 funds are accounted for. However, next year remains an open question for everyone. Dave and Catherine and the Fiscal team have been working on a follow-up audit from the State Auditor's Office. As some members may recall, the State Auditor formally audited the Council in 2021, the first in over a decade. This new audit follows up on that process, though the exact scope has yet to be determined. Jen recently provided a walkthrough of the Grants Management System to the auditors. It has been an informative process, helping us refine procedures and ensure compliance. Overall, the audit has been routine. Finally, a rigorous cybersecurity program has been implemented, which the entire staff has now completed, further strengthening our operational resilience.

The Chair asked when the audit would be complete and Dave explained that staff do not, at this point, know what the timing will be, but it will be likely over the course of the next few months.

Julie Wake asked what the NEA funds typically go to. Dave explained that historically,

aside from federal funds specifically allocated to Poetry Out Loud and Traditional Arts, our federal funding has been used to supplement our regular grant programs. In the past, the Agency has allocated these funds to organizational support programs and creative youth development grants to organizations. Because federal money comes with specific requirements, we've aimed to distribute it to larger organizations that are better equipped to comply with the additional audit and reporting obligations that come with federal funds. While it's challenging to predict what the future of federal funds will be, we're all participating in webinars discussing NEA funding, but right now, there are still a lot of unanswered questions.

There were no further questions for Dave. The Chair asked Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless for her report.

Jen noted that in the materials, members will find a wealth of information from the Programs Team. After today's meeting, we will have officially concluded our FY25 grantmaking. The Cultural Facilities Fund is finalizing its review via MassDevelopment's Cultural Facilities Fund Advisory Committee and that program will soon announce awards in May. Meanwhile, the Fiscal Team is working hard to process payments for grantees. The application for Operating Grants for Organizations for FY26 has opened with the goal of presenting a final funding list at the August Council Meeting, once we have clarity on our spending plan and allocations.

Next week, the new Creative Experiences Program opens, combining STARS Residencies and Festivals & Projects programs. This is a one-year, project-based funding opportunity with broad eligibility. Applicants can request either \$2,500 or \$5,000 in support. Council Members will receive more details when the program officially launches next week.

Jen then gave a brief update on the new Poet Laureate Program. The staff has worked closely with the Governor's Office—following the Executive Order—alongside Mass Humanities, and moved quickly to design the program. The initiative includes an honorarium recognizing achievement, with most guidelines set by the Executive Order. The Agency's priority was to create a simple, effective application process that encourages participation. The Poet Laureate Program gained momentum quickly, and Jen is happy to address any questions later in her update.

Then she asked Dan to give his presentation on Grants for Creative Individuals.

Dan said that he is pleased to join today's meeting. He is joined by Program Officer Summer Confuorto and they work alongside Program Officer Kelly Bennett to administer Grants for Creative Individuals which are \$5,000 grants for artists and cultural bearers across various artistic disciplines. Dan acknowledged the leadership at Mass Cultural Council and the Council Members' support for the program, as well as their commitment to increasing funding for artists. Dan explained that this year, the Agency is recommending awarding 447 grants of \$5,000 each. At the Programs Committee Meeting, the team presented 435 grants, as Jen mentioned. As we neared the end of the fiscal year, we were able to allocate unspent funds from other programs to add to Grants for Creative Individuals, allowing us to support even more artists. Dan then shared his screen to showcase some of the incredible work from the artists the team is recommending for funding this year. The goal of the presentation was to highlight the richness and diversity of creative expression among the proposed grantees and to celebrate work that is distinctly Massachusetts.

Chair Marc Carroll and Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis both expressed their gratitude to Dan and his team for the presentation remarking that seeing the work made them feel proud and that it helped contextualize the vote the Council would take later in the meeting. There were no further comments or questions. The Chair asked Programs Committee Chair Cecil Barron Jensen for her report from the Committee's recent meeting.

Cecil began by taking a moment to thank Jen, Dan, and Summer for their presentation noting that it truly makes the Council feel encouraged as they prepare to review the recommendations from the Programs Committee. Cecil brought Council Members' attention to the report included in their meeting materials as it provides an excellent overview of the presentation the Committee received. She highlighted the consolidation update—noting that Council Members will see the immense amount of work that has gone into streamlining the Agency's grant programs, reducing 18 funded programs in FY21 to 11 in FY25. This reflects a strategic, deliberate effort to make our programs more impactful across the Commonwealth. The Programs Committee recommends to the Council funding for the Gaming Mitigation Program, Grants for Creative Individuals, Cultural Investment Portfolio/Operating Grants for Organizations, and the new Poet Laureate Program with full endorsement. Mark Snyder moved to approve the recommended grants; Diane Asadorian Masters seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Secretary Yvonne Hao, David Kong, Emily Bramhall, and Donna Haghighat were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the Gaming Mitigation Fund grants as presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve the final list of Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve the Grants for Creative Individuals as described and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To authorize up to \$15,000 of any grants previously approved this fiscal year but which funds were returned or cancelled and any other funds made available by any other party (and, to the extent such funds are insufficient, funds from Mass Cultural Council's general appropriation) to provide a grant to the Massachusetts Poet Laureate as chosen under Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Order 640 as described in the memo presented to the Council meeting

The following Council Members abstained from voting and/or discussing grants pertaining to the organizations listed under their name:

Marc Carroll
 a. Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
 b. The Rivers School

Jo-Ann Davis
 a. The Care Center
 b. Springfield Museums
 c. MASSCreative

Cecil Barron Jensen

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

Che Anderson

- a. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
- b. Worcester Historical Museum
- c. Worcester Art Museum
- d. Institute of Contemporary Art

Donna Haghighat

- a. WAM Theater

Julie Wake

- a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod

Rhonda Anderson

- a. Ohketeau Cultural Center
- b. New England Foundation for the Arts
- c. Mass Humanities

Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

Ashley Occhino

- a. Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition/One South Coast Community Foundation
- b. Southeastern Massachusetts Visitors Bureau
- c. SouthCoast Community Foundation
- d. Society of Arts and Crafts

There were no further comments or questions and the Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:35am.



Power of culture

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

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Rhonda Anderson
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
Cecil Barron Jensen
Donna Haghighat
Diane Asadorian Masters
Anika Lopes
Ellice Patterson

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Bethann Steiner, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Ann Petruccelli Moon, and Dawn Heinen.

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:05AM and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

After David read the statement, the Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss and vote on two matters: one, a compensation recommendation for Executive Director Michael Bobbitt; the second, the process for regular reviews of the Executive Director's compensation moving forward. The Chair gave a summary of the events that led to today's meeting: late last year, Executive Director Michael Bobbitt requested an adjustment to his salary because he felt it fell below that of his peers. The Council last met to review Michael's compensation in August 2023. At that time the Executive Committee agreed that if a salary adjustment was requested again, the Council should hire a third-party consultant to assist with salary benchmarking. This is exactly what the Council did. Arts Consulting Group (ACG) – the same group that worked with Mass Cultural Council for the Executive Director search that led to Michael's hiring – performed salary benchmarking research and produced a report and recommendation. ACG suggested the Executive Director's salary should fall within

Prepared on 5/15/25

\$179,000 and \$215,000 annually. At the time of Michael's request for an increase, his salary was \$185,000, which did fall within the recommended range. In January 2025, Michael, along with all senior directors and managers at Mass Cultural Council, received a 3% cost-of-living adjustment, increasing his annual salary to \$190,550. (*The meeting minutes have been corrected to reflect this amount, which was mistakenly stated as \$195,500 during the meeting.*) However, after further meetings, the latest of which took place on April 16, the Committee decided to provide Michael with an increase and bring his salary to \$197,000 annually – the midpoint of ACG's recommended range – given Michael's outstanding performance and his years of service. The Chair thanked Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis for her work as the Committee moved through the process and asked if she had anything to add.

The Vice Chair thanked the Chair and stated that he accurately summarized the process. She also shared that in her experience as an HR professional and as a member of the Council in 2023 when the Executive Director's salary was previously discussed, the practice of hiring a third-party consultant for salary benchmarking is advisable, wise, and the right thing to do.

The Chair recognized Ché Anderson, who echoed the sentiments shared by the Chair and Vice Chair's and expressed that while this was a challenging process with a number of factors at play, one of the things the Executive Committee agreed on is that Michael is doing an excellent job as the Agency's Executive Director.

The Chair recognized Cecil Barron Jensen who thanked the Chair and Vice Chair for handling this sensitive and difficult process so professionally; she added that the Committee loves the work Michael is doing.

The Chair recognized Simone Early who asked if Michael would receive another cost of living increase this year. The Chair explained that Senior Director of Business Operations and Chief Financial Officer Catherine Cheng-Anderson informed him that another cost-of-living increase of 2% will most likely occur in July. If it does, Michael will receive that increase as well. As part of the process the Council will vote on later in the meeting, the Executive Committee will reserve the right to determine if the Executive Director receives cost-of-living increases on a case-by-case basis and if there is a scenario where the Council doesn't feel it's the right time for the Executive Director to accept a cost-of-living increase a meeting can be held to discuss this.

The Chair recognized Diane Asadorian Masters who asked if there has been any talk of a hiring freeze or funding freeze within state agencies given that state government budgets will be impacted by the reduction in funding from the federal government. The Chair asked Catherine Cheng-Anderson to respond, and she stated that she and the senior leadership team are watching this closely but haven't heard anything official pertaining to the executive branch just yet.

There were no further questions. The Chair reiterated that the salary recommendation for Executive Director Michael Bobbitt is \$197,000 effective today, April 22, with no retroactive pay. He asked for a motion and a second to approve the recommendation. Donna Haghighat moved to approve the recommendation; Rhonda Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Allyce Najimy, Julie Wake, Ashley Occhino, Mark Snyder, David Kong, Petrina Martin, and Yvonne Hao were absent, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: That the Council approves the Executive Committee's salary recommendation for Executive Director Michael Bobbitt as announced at the Council Meeting.

The Chair explained that the second item the Council would consider is a resolution to adopt a policy moving forward on how the Council will handle Executive Director compensation. The Executive Committee agreed that reviewing the Executive Director's salary every three years to ensure the position is compensated fairly and that the Agency can retain the best possible talent. Every three years a qualified third-party professional will be retained to provide salary benchmarking data. In addition, and as was just discussed, the Council will reserve the right to decide whether cost-of-living increases apply to the Executive Director's compensation. Cost-of-living increases will be automatic unless the Council recommends a review and discussion.

The Chair recognized Simone Early who expressed that she did not believe the recent salary benchmarking research by ACG included comparisons across state agency heads with budgets similar to Mass Cultural Council's. Simone requests that this be part of future salary benchmarking research.

The Chair asked Simone if she was referring to the timeline or the research itself. Simone refers to the information included in the report; the current report looks at many different executives doing the exact same work Michael is doing, but it did not include a comparison between executives in state agencies working with state budgets.

The Chair recognized Diane Asadorian Masters who asked if the salary review every three years would also include a performance review. The Chair explained that it would be a salary review, but that when the Council is considering whether to give the Executive Director a raise, their performance would be part of that consideration.

The Chair recognized Iván Espinoza-Madrigal who expressed that the Council shouldn't need to wait for the formal report or study to implement salary changes. Adjustments could be made based on an internal year-end review. Benchmarking, which we conduct every three years, is a separate process focused on gathering external data to ensure our compensation remains competitive. It's important to distinguish between these two, as we want to maintain the flexibility to make necessary salary adjustments between benchmarking studies.

The Chair clarified that historically there have been at least one or two cost-of-living increases given by the Commonwealth each year that the Executive Director will still be eligible for; the position will not have a pay increase freeze for the three years between benchmarking studies. The Chair asked Catherine Cheng-Anderson to confirm this, and she stated that this cadence of cost-of-living increases is accurate, adding that when the Commonwealth goes through economic hardship this could change for senior leadership and managers.

There were no further questions, and the Chair asked for a motion and a second to approve the policy. Diane Asadorian Masters moved to approve the policy; Anika Lopes seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Allyce Najimy, Julie Wake, Ashley Occhino, Mark Snyder, David Kong, Petrina Martin, and Yvonne Hao were absent, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: That, the Council shall adopt the following policy when approving the Executive Director annual compensation

- No less frequently than every three years hereafter, the Council shall retain a qualified independent third party professional firm to provide executive salary benchmarking data with respect to the Executive Director's compensation, all on such terms as the Chair may direct; and
- The Council shall reserve the right whether to allow any Commonwealth "cost of living" increases for managers generally to apply to the Executive Director's compensation.

The Chair concluded the meeting by encouraging Council Members to attend Creative Sector Day at the Massachusetts State House on April 30 stating that it is an important event and a great way to celebrate the creative sector.

Council Members were confused because there was an erroneous message sent via an Outlook calendar item earlier that morning indicating that the event was canceled. It is not canceled, and Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon will send a note clarifying this to the full Council momentarily.

There were no further questions, and the Chair adjourned the meeting at 12:32pm.



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
Council and Committee Meetings Schedule
FY 2026

2025

- Executive Committee Meeting – Aug. 6th, 10am
- Programs Committee Meeting – Aug. 6th, 1pm
- Advancement Committee Meeting – Aug. 11th, 10am
- 166th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council – Aug. 19th, 9am
- Advancement Committee Meeting – Oct. 8, 10am
- Executive Committee Meeting – October 22ND, 10am
- Programs Committee Meeting – October 22ND, 1pm
- 167th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council – October 29th, Noon **in-person**

2026

- Advancement Committee Meeting – Feb. 4th 10am
- Executive Committee Meeting – Feb 11th, 10am
- Programs Committee Meeting – Feb 11th, 1pm
- 168th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council – Feb 25th at 10am
- Executive Committee Meeting – April 14th, 10am
- 169th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council & Council Retreat – April 29th, Noon **in-person**
- Advancement Committee Meeting – May 13th, 10am
- Executive Committee Meeting – June 17th, 10am

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS AS OF 7.17.25

Executive Committee

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Simone Early, Member-at-Large
Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
Cecil Barron Jensen
Julie Wake

Programs Committee

Marc Carroll – ex officio
JoAnn Davis – ex officio
Cecil Barron Jensen – Co-Chair
Julie Wake – Co-Chair
Donna Haghighat
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Ashley Occhino
Mark Snyder

Advancement Committee

Marc Carroll – ex officio
JoAnn Davis – ex officio
Ché Anderson – Co-Chair
Iván Espinosa Madrigal – Co-Chair
Rhonda Anderson
David S. Kong
Diane Asadorian Masters
Anika Lopes
Petrina Martin
Allyce Najimy



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EXECUTIVE OFFICE UPDATE

AUGUST 2025

Activities Report

On Friday, August 1, Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon shared the August Executive Department Update detailing activities during the previous month. Please look for the next monthly update in early September.

Conferences & Engagements. In addition to the travel approved at the August 6 Executive Committee meeting (see below), Michael also traveled or will travel to the following events (at no cost to the Agency).

Recently Completed Engagements

Boston Art Review Panel Discussion in Provincetown
August 9 and 10, 2025

Michael participates in a panel discussion hosted by *Boston Art Review* in Provincetown, MA on the evening of August 9. The panel is focused on queer leadership. From navigating funding cuts to protecting spaces for queer expression, the panel seeks to share strategies for resistance, advocacy, and sustaining queer-led cultural work in a precarious political climate.

WBUR Circle Round Podcast Recording at Tanglewood
August 2 and 3, 2025

Michael participated in an all-day recording and performance with WBUR's Circle Round podcast and the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood's Linde Center for Music and Learning on August 3. Circle Round is a storytelling podcast for children; they produce live recordings of the podcast in partnership with the BSO and Michael joined the cast for this summer recording.

Black Theater Network National Conference in Los Angeles
July 24-28, 2025

Michael gave the keynote address at this national conference entitled *Arts & Liberation, Achieving Black Permanence*. The conference was an opportunity to share space with others who are dedicated to the exploration and preservation of the theatrical visions of the African diaspora and advanced Mass Cultural Council's goals in this area.

Lehigh Valley Arts & Culture Convening in Allentown, PA

May 29, 2025

Michael gave the keynote address and spoke about the arts as a catalyst for unity and civic engagement, framing the arts not as a luxury but essential for quality of life, community, and redevelopment. Through his remarks Michael shared Mass Cultural Council's ideas about developing a sustainable arts and cultural sector with peers in Pennsylvania – arts, business, government, education, and funding leaders.

NASAA Board Meeting in Washington DC

May 6-10, 2025

Michael traveled to Washington, DC to participate in the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies' May Board Meeting of which he is a member. This meeting is held in-person every spring. Mass Cultural Council has a long affiliation with NASAA which nationally advocates for state arts agencies.

Upcoming Engagements

Blumenthal Arts Events in Charlotte, NC

August 19 and 20, 2025

Michael gives four presentations: three 80-minute fundraising workshops for Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District theater teachers; and a “fireside chat” presentation on Mass Cultural Council's social prescription work for arts leaders in Charlotte, NC.

[Robert J. Thompson Eastern Leadership Academy](#) in Philadelphia, PA

August 24-28, 2025

Executive Director Michael Bobbitt has been accepted as a Fellow in the Robert J. Thompson Eastern Leadership Academy. The Academy annually convenes 30 officials from the 18 member jurisdictions of the Council of State Governments' Eastern Region, representing all three branches of state and provincial government. Participants engage in an intensive four-day program to strengthen leadership and communication skills through interactive training with experts in media, education, and government. Michael's application was supported by a letter of recommendation from Massachusetts State Representative Mindy Domb. Participation in this program will enhance Michael's leadership toolkit and expand his network within state government—resources that will support the agency's advancement priorities. Program tuition, lodging, and some meals are provided by the Council of State Governments.

[American Society of Landscape Architects \(ASLA\) Annual Conference](#) in New Orleans, LA

October 10-12, 2025

Executive Director Michael Bobbitt has been invited to present at the 2025 ASLA Annual Conference. He will join Kara Elliott-Ortega of the Kresge Foundation (formerly Chief of Arts & Culture for the City of Boston) and Anna Crawse of Sasaki in a session titled Making Space for Culture: Strategies for Supporting Cultural Programming in Public Landscapes. This session will explore how government and private foundations

can advance cultural programming in public spaces through effective policy and collaboration. Michael will highlight Mass Cultural Council's work as case studies, sharing insights into the challenges and opportunities facing the cultural sector in shared public environments. This major national event attracts over 6,000 professionals, including landscape architects, urban and environmental planners, engineers, developers, sustainability experts, and government officials.

Creating Healthy Communities 2025 in Newark, NJ - Hosted by University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center
October 14-16, 2025

Michael will be a panelist during a session on arts prescribing. The national conference will bring together 500 artists, public health and healthcare professionals, community builders, educators, and social change agents to explore the power of the arts to connect communities and enhance health and well-being.

[National Assembly of State Arts Agencies \(NASAA\) Executive Forum](#), in Omaha, NE
November 11-13, 2025

Biennial gathering designed for executive and deputy directors of state arts agencies. Provides a confidential setting for peer learning, collaborative problem-solving, and leadership development. Michael and David last attended in 2023. This year's forum will provide continued opportunities to engage with colleagues from across the country and address pressing challenges in the state arts sector.

Executive Committee. The Executive Committee met on August 6 to discuss and recommend for approval the proposed FY26 Spending Plan included in Section 10 of the agenda for today's meeting, approved out-of-state travel for staff members, and approved the agenda for today's Council Meeting.

Programs Committee. The Programs Committee also met on August 6 and recommended for approval to the full Council, the grant and program recommendations for FY26 made by staff.

Advancement Committee. The Advancement Committee met on August 11 and received an update on staff's advancement activities which will be summarized in the Executive Director's report at today's meeting.

Welcome New Council Member. As we notified the Council last month, on July 16 Governor Healey appointed Tom Bernard of North Adams to the Mass Cultural Council. Please join us in welcoming him to his first meeting.

Conflict of Interest Notifications. Deputy Director Dave Slatery has asked all Council members to report all potential conflicts of interest and connections with any cultural organizations or potential grantees. Doing so ensures that Agency's minutes and records can appropriately reflect that members are recused from any discussion

or vote on grants or other Agency arrangements with which a member has a possible conflict. For further information, please refer to Dave's emails to the Council communications. A copy of the most recent conflict list is contained in the appendices to this Council Meeting Book

A reminder that all Committee meeting materials (as well as all Council Meeting materials) are posted and available for review at our website's Council page at [Governing Council – Mass Cultural Council](#).

Culture bridges

Advancement Committee

August 11, 2025



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Advancement at the Mass Cultural Council

2



Creative Individuals Grant Celebration | Lauren Miller Photography

Two Primary Goals

1. Position the arts and culture sector as a **visible, recognized resource and an essential partner** in problem solving across the Commonwealth
2. **Leverage resources** from outside of our sector for the economic benefit of those within

Advancement in FY26

3

FY26: The entire program staff developed specific, measurable, and achievable goals for the fiscal year

- Each goal has specific 1-month, 3-month, 6-month, and full year benchmarks for accountability
- Each team balanced their existing expertise with the needs of constituents and opportunities in the current environment



Anticipated Impact

4

Staff goals fall broadly under three kinds of activities:

- Leveraging New Resources
- Changing Field Behavior
- Continuing to share resources with our field through existing communication channels

Expanding Our Brand

5



- New Web Presence:
<https://massculturalcouncil.org/advancement>
- Blogs:
[What We Talk about When We Talk About Advancement
https://massculturalcouncil.org/blog/tag/advancement/](https://massculturalcouncil.org/blog/tag/advancement/)

Advancement is Cross-Agency Work

6

Based on constituent needs and priorities of the Commonwealth, four areas of overlap across teams were identified:

- Economic Development
- Workforce Development
- Space
- Access to social services and support

Ongoing cross-agency meetings will be held to share resources and foster collaboration

Advancement Activities

7

- **Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU33, Providence)**
 - Explored the importance of regional connectivity, collaboration, and coherence.
 - Presented '*Massachusetts's Cultural Districts Initiative: Reexamining Policy, Purpose, and Process for Greater Impact*'
- **Commonwealth Seminar**
 - Attended six-week intensive session designed to educate and train diverse leaders to navigate the legislative process to access and influence decision-makers at all levels of government.
- **State Graduation Council**
 - Michael was appointed by the Governor to the K-12 Statewide Graduation Requirements Council to be a part of a team recommending new graduation requirements for Massachusetts public school students

Advancement Activities

8

- **STEM to STEAM**

- On June 26th we presented to the STEM Advisory Council and had a conversation, facilitated by the Lt. Governor, around the vital role of Creativity in the Innovation Economy and educational systems
- Based on that presentation we have recommended the creation of a STEAM Advisory Council to make recommendations for integration into the STEM Advisory Committee

- **Live Music at Logan**

- Launched on July 1, 2025 and funded by Massport, this busking pilot program provides live music at baggage claim areas throughout the summer at Logan Airport

- **Creative Futures**

- Convening to develop a shared agenda for Massachusetts Higher Education Institutions to prepare students for sustainable, politically engaged careers

Advancement Activities

9

- **MassChallenge**
 - Working with a non-profit incubator to support creativity as an essential skill for innovation and the future of business in Massachusetts

- **Ongoing Conversations**
 - Executive Office of Labor
 - Commonwealth Corporation
 - Department of Conservation and Recreation
 - New Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
 - New Secretary of Health and Human Services
 - Executive Office of Veteran's Affairs Strategic Planning Process

Arts Prescriptions by the Numbers

10

Based on proprietary unpublished data gathered through Art Pharmacy reporting:

- 1,105 individuals were provided arts prescriptions in 2025
- 2,291 doses of arts and culture referred
- 1,673 doses of arts and culture completed
- 181 Arts Organizations were referred
- A total of 466 Arts Organizations are currently in the Art Pharmacy Network



Community Music Center of Boston

Arts Prescriptions Impact in FY25

11



MassAudubon

- 60% of members improved their WHO-5 score
- Average rating of engagements with arts and culture experiences by patients was 8.9/10
- 9.4/10 patients recommended their healthcare provider or plan because of access to Art Pharmacy

Arts Prescriptions Impact in FY25

12

- Patients in enrolled participating health plans experienced:
 - A 40% reduction in emergency room visits
 - More than a 300% reduction in behavioral health admissions
- Approximately 90% of patients were BIPOC with 25% primarily Spanish speaking



Community Access to the Arts (CATA)

Arts Prescriptions in Massachusetts

13



Clark Art Institute | Photo by Christina Lane

- National Endowment for the Arts Funding Awarded to our arts prescription program
- \$75,000 grant for one year
- Currently developing guidelines focused on MassHealth. More information about granting those funds will be available at the October Council Meeting

CDI Redesign

14

Purpose: To conduct a deep review of all aspects of the Cultural Districts Initiative (CDI), in accordance with our [Strategic Plan](#), to ensure the designation and program truly drives economic growth through creativity within our districts and their host communities.

State Agency Task Force

- Working to formalize as a Commonwealth Consortium
- Provide ongoing, cross-sector support, resources and opportunities for Cultural Districts
- CDI Application Review Committee

Redesign Timeline

- July-September 2025: Public communications / Finalize program guidelines, application, report.
- November 2025-May 2027: Bring current districts into compliance.
- July 2026: Application opens to new districts with March 2027 deadline.



Huntington Theater, Fenway Cultural District

External Networks, Partnerships, & Development

15

Percent for Place Coalition

Over two dozen national and nonprofit entities focused on increasing public investment in civic infrastructure.

- Partners include Smart Growth America, Main Street America, Project for Public Spaces, CNU, Trust for Public Land, America Walks, Reimagine the Civic Commons, Center for Rural Strategies, and is funded by JP Morgan Chase.



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Housing and
Economic Development

EOED - Downtown Partnership Initiative:

Cultural Districts Initiative + Mass Downtown Initiative + MassDevelopment TDI

EOED funded, multi-phase process to identify opportunities for collaboration and collective sustainability amongst these place-based economic development initiatives.

- Early recommendations include interagency agreements, technical assistance opportunities, joint reporting on investments, and potential capital improvement funds.



How You Can Help

16



Drumlin Farm, Mass Audubon

Priority areas:

- Community and Economic Development
- Organizational and Individual Business and Economic Development
- Health
- Education
- Space Creation, Preservation and Climate

Any connections you can provide are leads we can use to advance our work

Thank you!

Erik.Holmgren@mass.gov

Carolyn.Cole@mass.gov



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EQUITY PROGRESS REPORT

AUGUST 2025

NEW EQUITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- As part of the implementation of the Agency's [d/Deaf and Disability Equity Plan](#), the Disability Advisory Committee was formed and onboarded
- Since the February Council meeting, we have made great strides towards one of the Agency's Access goals by working with a consultant to upgrade HireCulture.org to make it more accessible for those who visit the site and interact with it using a screen reader.

SECTOR EDUCATION, SERVICES & ACHIEVEMENT

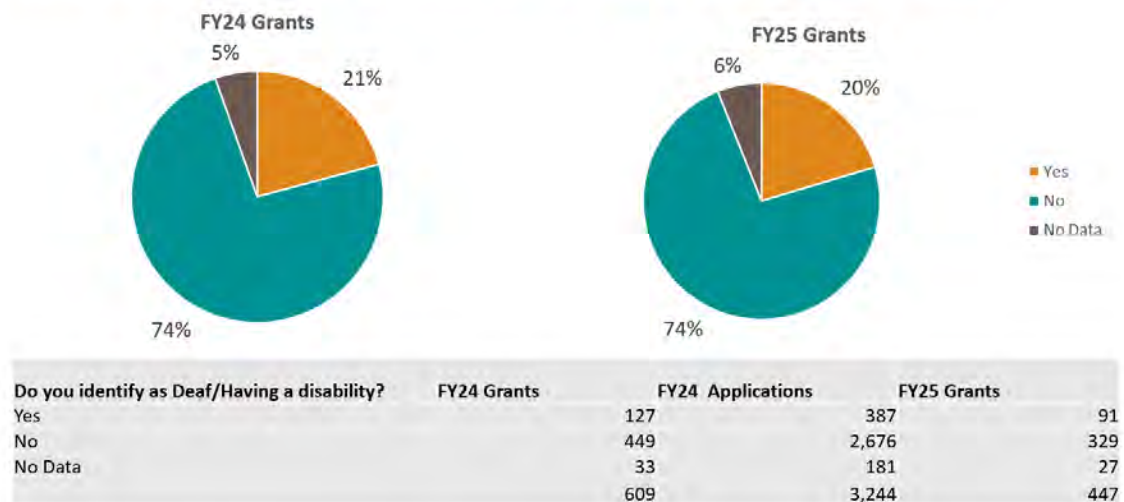
- Charles Baldwin, our Access & Inclusion Program Officer has held monthly Access Office Hours including the following topics: Arts and Culture Self-Assessment, Access Planning, Assistive Technology, Venue/Producer Responsibilities, Workforce Development, Marketing and Communication, Emergency Preparedness.
- The Agency also held two online Spotlight sessions focused on access and inclusion: [Open Door Arts](#) and [Mass Office on Disability](#).
- We have posted the following Access & Equity-themed articles in our Power of Culture blog since February:
 - [Welcome Disability Advisory Committee](#) June 12, 2025
 - [Supporting Organizations Developing Access Plans](#) April 3, 2025

PROGRAMS

- The agency reviewed its FY25 grant making data and shared it with the Programs Committee in June. The full presentation is available online with the meeting material. The agency continues to provide strong support for the d/Deaf and Disability community, with room for improvement after seeing a slight dip in representation compared to FY24:

Individuals: Identify as Deaf/Disability

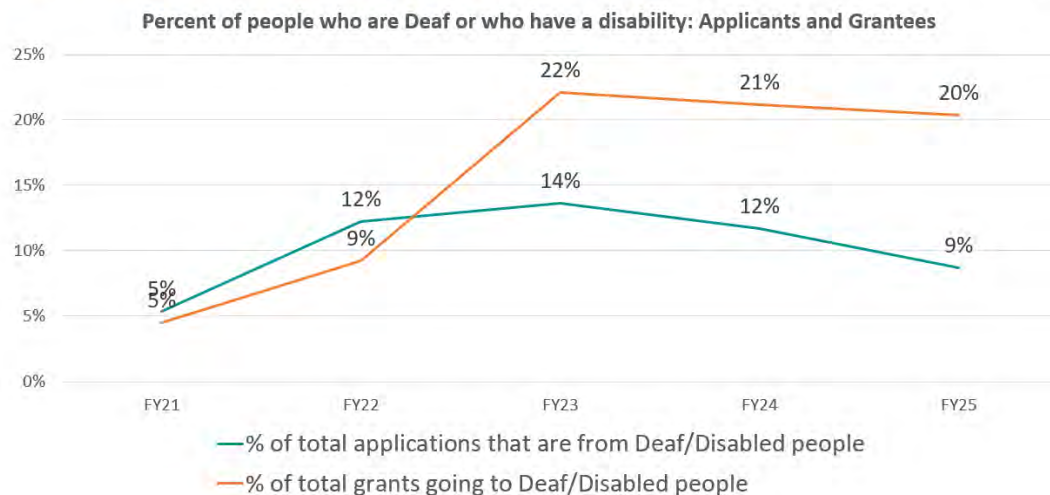
37



- During one Disability Advisory Committee meeting, we took a deeper dive into the data to support the work of the committee. We looked at these numbers over time. Funding priorities for people who identify as having a disability were introduced in FY23:

Individual Data Over Time

14



- We compared these numbers to state demographic data to see how aligned we are.
 - MA population between 18 and 64 is 11.5% people with disability ([Mass Rehabilitation Commission](#))
 - After introducing the funding priority for disability from FY23 to FY25, representation in our applicant and grantee pools exceeded 11.5% except in FY25 when the applicant pool representation slipped to 9%.

- We also reviewed applicant feedback surveys comparing aggregate responses from people who identify as Deaf or Disabled to people who do not so identify. While the responses largely aligned across most of the 4 questions, we identified an area where they are significantly different – the time it takes to complete applications.

39% of people with disabilities spent 3 hours or more on their application compared to 25% of people without disabilities.

We identified several next steps to gather more information to understand the issue so we can identify and make improvements.

INTERNAL

- The Public Affairs department and the Access & Inclusion Program Officer worked with the same consultant who helped with HireCulture upgrades to develop a 2-part virtual training for all staff on how to create accessible documents in Word and Adobe. One of the Agency's Access goals is to ensure that all externally facing documents prepared by staff will be checked for access in the same way that they would be reviewed for spelling and other editing considerations.
- To follow these trainings, Public Affairs updated the internal staff template documents to reflect what was learned in terms of creating accessible documents that work compatibly with screen readers.
- Business Operations and the Access & Inclusion Program Officer worked together to plan and schedule an all-staff anti-ableist training led by [EPIC](#) to support staff learning and professional development.



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE

AUGUST 2025

Budget/Legislative/Advocacy Report

- On July 15 Mass Cultural Council was invited to testify before a panel of two legislative committees for an [Informational Hearing](#) on how changes in federal policy and cuts to funding is affecting the Massachusetts cultural sector. A week later Mass Cultural Council presented on the same topic during a Listening Session convened by the Healey-Driscoll Administration's [Federal Funds and Infrastructure Office](#).
- The [FY26 State Budget](#) was signed into law by Governor Healey on July 4; it contains nearly \$27 million for arts and culture through Mass Cultural Council's line item appropriation. This amount is being used to support the Agency's FY26 spending plan, which the Council is considering in the August meeting. Additionally, the Healey-Driscoll Administration's [FY26 Capital Spending Plan](#) invests \$10 million into the Capital Facilities Fund, which will support a new grant round this year.
- We anticipate public hearings will be convened this fall to consider our two bills, An Act [clarifying eligibility to the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund](#) and An Act [advancing Massachusetts from STEM to STEAM](#).

Events/Communications/Digital Communications Report

Events

Public Affairs planned and executed several public events this spring/summer in collaboration with program teams and external partners:

- *Gaming Mitigation Fund Grants Celebration* at the Guthrie Center in Great Barrington with Vice-Chair Jo-Ann Davis (April 14, 2025)
- *Poetry Out Loud Massachusetts: Celebrating 20 Years* at the State House with Chair Marc Carroll, Julie Wake and Diane Asadorian Masters (April 15, 2025)
- *Creative Individuals Grants Celebration* at the State House with Council Members Ellice Patterson & Diane Asadorian Masters (May 19, 2025)
- *Cultural Facilities Fund Grants Celebration* at Zumix in East Boston with Chair Marc Carroll and Council Member Iván Espinoza-Madrigal (June 27, 2025)
- *Live Music at Logan Program Launch* at Boston Logan International Airport with Massport (July 1, 2025)

Since launching the [2024 Massachusetts Cultural Asset Inventory](#) in March, we've offered a number of briefings for partners all across the state to share this data.

- State House Briefing for Legislators and Staff - March 13, 2025
- Virtual Briefings - March 21 & 25, 2024
- Cambridge Briefing (In partnership with Cambridge Community Foundation, Central Square Theatre, and MASSCreative) - May 1, 2025
- Worcester County Briefing (In partnership with the Fitchburg Cultural Alliance, Worcester Cultural Coalition, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, and MASSCreative) - May 14, 2025
- Virtual Briefing for Philanthropy MA / MA Arts Funders Network - May 27, 2025

Looking ahead: The Public Affairs team is working with internal and external partners to plan several events located in different regions of the Commonwealth throughout the fall. Please be on the lookout for emails from Bethann with additional details. Council members are warmly welcome (and encouraged!) to participate in all our convenings.

- *Tribal Cultural Council Program Launch & FY25 Grant Celebration* - Plymouth area TBD (Late September/Early October)
- *Fall Regional Grant Celebrations* - locations throughout the state (September - November)

Media/Community Relations

Mass Cultural Council in the news:

- [Mass creative sector requests budget funding](#). WWLP, March 4, 2025
- [New report gives snapshot of state's cultural sector, with many earning less than a living wage](#). Boston Globe, March 11, 2025
- [Arts-based prescription reduces social isolation, yields results](#). Boston Globe, March 29, 2025 (Letter to the editor from Michael Bobbitt)
- [State backs performing arts centers through grants](#). Berkshire Edge, April 17, 2025
- [Mass. artists receive grants, concerns remain](#). WWLP, May 19, 2025
- [Regie Gibson selected as state's inaugural poet laureate](#). Boston Globe, May 30, 2025.
- [Mass. Cultural Council awards \\$6.5M for 'behind-the-scenes' facilities work](#). Boston Business Journal, June 27, 2025.
- [Live music at Logan? Pilot program brings buskers to baggage claim](#). Boston Business Journal, July 1, 2025

WEB

Updated the web site in support of Spring/Summer Agency activities, such as:

- Program guidelines (Creative Experiences, Poet Laureate)

- Grant announcements/Funding lists (Gaming Mitigation, Creative Individuals, Local Cultural Councils, UP Innovation Fund, Cultural Facilities Fund)
- Advocacy (Economic impact reports, state budget process, federal agency updates, testimony offered, FY25 legislative funding reports)

Developed new content and web pages to mark our Advancement work:

- A web presence for [Advancement & Strategic Partnerships](#) will act as a 'dashboard' of sorts to demonstrate our ongoing work to develop partnerships and expand cross-sector opportunities.
- [2024 Massachusetts Cultural Asset Inventory](#), including
 - Online summary report
 - One-pagers with state and county data
 - Links to full report and deck

Launched a campaign to [celebrate the 45th anniversary of the LCC Program](#), which so far includes [social media posts](#) and [LCC Member Nano Interviews](#).

Designed a series of case studies for the Cultural Facilities Fund team as part of their work to adapt public buildings for creative uses. The first installment of 4 – [featuring The 204 in Harwich](#) - was published this month.

Working on site edits to reflect FY26 grants and initiatives.

BLOG

- Published [56 blog posts](#) in the last 6 months, in partnership with Program and Operations staff, to amplify and document the Agency's work.

ENEWSLETTERS

Our 3 e-newsletters continue to see growing numbers of subscribers and solid open rates. In the last 6 months:

- [Power of Culture's](#) subscriber list rose by 1,040. Open rates averaged 54.5%.
- [Community Initiative News'](#) list rose by 385. Open rates averaged 56%.
- [Artist News'](#) list rose by 326. Open rates averaged 52%.



Power of culture

PROGRAMS UPDATE

AUGUST 2025

Access and Inclusion

Universal Participation (UP)

UP Innovation Fund. 92 organizations received the UP Innovation Fund grants to build/improve access. Annual reports are being reviewed now for challenges/successes which help in determining topics for Access Office Hours. See grant memo for information on FY26 funding.

Meetings and Events

Monthly check-in with Agency departments: Artists & Education, Organizations & Experiences, Communities & Districts, and Advancement. Participated in the Cultural Districts redesign. Reviewed access criteria and select responses for 2026 Creative Experience applications. Co-hosted webinars for Mass Housing.

Monthly check-in with Open Door Arts on the development of the Arts Access Hub: content, navigation, resources, experts, artists, and users. (August 20, 2025 launch date).

Ongoing: NEA monthly, Smithsonian monthly, NEFA every other month. With the dismantling of the Access dept of the NEA, we have begun working with Eric Giles at NASAA to ensure the ADA coordinators from State Art Agencies still convene regularly. Regular counsel and learning opportunities with The Boston Foundation, Historic New England, NASAA, Tower Hill Botanic Garden, and Mass Cultural Council grantees and applicants.

Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD Conference): co-developed a Foundations of Access series of learning for people attending LEAD that are new to this work.

Advancement

Building relationships with MassAbility: MA Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, Mass Office on Disability, MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard-

Prepared on 8/12/25

of-Hearing, MA Developmental Disabilities Council, Mass Housing, Envisioning Access, Howe Innovation Center, Lights! Camera! Access!, Deaf Center at BU, and the Health and Disability Equity cohort via the Department of Public Health.

Inclusive Workforce Development: Working with the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, hosted an Inclusive Hiring Cohort with organizations in the UP Initiative including Open Door Arts, Community Access to the Arts, Boston Children's Museum, Zeiterion PAC, and On With Living and Learning.

Artists & Youth

Combined Team: In FY25, Mass Cultural Council restructured our program teams so that our Artists and Creative Youth Development/Arts Education staff were joined into one team- *Artists and Youth*, which includes Kelly Bennett and Summer Confuorto supporting artists/Grants for Creative Individuals Program; Amy Chu supporting arts education/Creative Experience Program; and Käthe Swaback supporting Creative Youth Development/YouthReach Program. In FY26 we continue into our second fiscal year as a unified team, managed by Dan Blask, supporting creative expression at all age levels.

Creative Experiences: Please see the grants memo about the first year of this streamlined program, which combines the Creative Projects for Schools and Festivals & Projects programs into one grant application supporting organizations, festivals, and schools.

Grants for Creative Individuals: In September, the team plans to begin accepting applications for the third year of the Grants for Creative Individuals, our Agency's accessible program to support artists, culture bearers, and creative practitioners in all disciplines. Staff is currently reviewing data from FY25 to finalize any potential adjustments for the FY26 guidelines and process.

YouthReach: FY26 is an important transition year for the YouthReach Program, which supports innovative creative youth development programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences. As part of the Agency's effort to reach more parts of the cultural sector by limiting multiple grants to the same organization, we have worked to better coordinate the YouthReach grant schedule with that of the Operating Grants for Organizations. YouthReach and Operation Grants for Organizations will now accept grant applications on alternating years.

To accommodate this plan, we extended the current cohort of YouthReach grantees one additional year so that organizations whose final year of funding before reapplying was to be FY25 now will receive another year of funding in FY26. (See list of FY26 YouthReach grants elsewhere in these materials.)

Meanwhile, we are preparing guidelines and a new, streamlined application for FY27 YouthReach grants, which we anticipate opening in March '27.

Poet Laureate: We are excited that Governor Maura Healey swore in the state's first Poet Laureate, Regie Gibson, on May 30, 2025. Staff has been in communication with the Governor's office over the summer to support their work managing the position. Those interested in the Poet Laureate and/or requesting services can do so on [Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov).

New England States Touring (NEST) grant program: Amy Chu from the Artists and Youth Team serves as Mass Cultural Council's representative on the New England States Touring grant program of our regional partner, the New England Foundation for the Arts. Due to uncertainty of federal funding, NEFA canceled the first of the program's planned three grant deadlines (in September). The next NEST grant deadline will be in December.

Advancement: The following represents the Artist & Youth Team's ongoing work to advance the creative and cultural sector.

- Supported this summer's pilot "Live Music at Logan" project, helping bring live local music into MassPort's Logan International Airport. Anticipate program will continue.
- Ongoing partnership with Governor's Office to exhibit MA artists in the Governor's waiting room at the State House.
- Continued partnership with [Work Without Limits](#), offering benefits counseling so our grantees can understand the impact of our grants on their public benefits.
- Continued support and participation in the Youth Arts Impact Network, connecting and strengthening Creative Youth Development practitioners to bring more resources and opportunities for teaching artists, young people, and youth-focused organizations.
- Summer Confuorto partnered with the New England Foundation for the Arts to support Walking Together, a regional initiative that seeks to advance and support communities of color working in the traditional arts. Summer and other State Arts Agency colleagues received a grant from the American Folklore Society for a project to strengthen resources for community cultural documentation. Summer is also the Council's representative on the Seal, Flag, and Motto Commission.

Community Initiative

The Community Initiative which includes the Local Cultural Council (LCC) program, Creative Experiences Program and the Cultural Districts Initiative (CDI) will be launching 2 grant programs in the fall of 2025. The LCC grant program and the CDI Grant Program. The Creative Experiences grant program, which is staffed by the Organizations team, the Communities team and the Artists &

Youth team, completed the FY26 grant cycle and are in the process of finalizing grants to approved grantees.

Regional Assignments & Staffing. The Community Initiative program staff work on a regional basis in order to more fully represent and support all Cultural Partners in the communities we serve. In FY26, program staff will continue to work closely with their LCCs as well as their municipalities to better support LCCs by being a connector and convenor, when necessary, between the cultural community and the municipality. We have had much success introducing the municipalities to their LCCs through the Mass Municipal Association trade show which we attend each year in January. In FY25 we lost one member of our team who is now working as part of the Advancement Team here at Mass Cultural Council and we will be hiring a new member of the team in the fall. Once fully staffed, the Communities team is comprised of 6 full time program officers and 1 Program Manager. In addition to supporting LCCs, of the 6 program officers, one is designated to support the Creative Experiences, another is designated to support the Cultural District Initiative, one is designated to the BIPOC Organization Self Identification Process, and all 6 of them flex to support the review process for all Communities and agency programs as needed.

Tribal and Local Cultural Council Programs In FY25 we completed our LCC grant cycle awarded 7,448 grants totaling \$7,654,049, a combination of Mass Cultural Council funds and funds raised by LCCs. We have updated our guidelines for the LCC program based on a survey that was sent to members after the FY24 grant cycle. The changes support more streamlined guidelines and more support for them in their grant review. In FY26 we will be conducting a series of webinars and workshops as the LCC grant cycle gets underway.

Please see the full grant memo for the recommended allocations for the Tribal and Local Cultural Council Programs in FY26.

LCC Online Application. The online application system will open on September 2nd with a few new changes to help streamline the process. The Local Cultural Council members continue to have the opportunity to review applications in real time which helps facilitate their voting meetings and enables them to hold meetings sooner in the grant cycle if they wish. The LCC team will be conducting webinars to update councils and applicants of the changes. We are now going into year 9 of the online application and it has been highly successful for councils, applicants and the Mass Cultural Council. The system allows us to gather data on applicants which can help us determine who is applying, the budgets of projects, who is being funded and, who is not being funded. In FY25 the LCC program received 12,801 number of applications and funded 7,448 (58%).

Application deadline for FY26 the grant application deadline will be October 16, 2025.

Events./Outreach/Advancement. The team continues to visit their communities and participate in LCC meetings, LCC grant receptions, Festivals and other programming where our LCCs and Cultural Districts are involved. Fall will be busy supporting our LCCs as they manage the grant cycle as well as assisting applicants with their applications. In addition, Cultural Districts will be applying for grants for their districts mid fall.

In addition, the Communities Team has been busy connecting and working with other state agencies, foundations and municipal entities to further the work of arts and culture in communities. We will continue to work on connecting with others who are providing support for the cultural sector and assess partnerships and collaborations as we move forward with our work. A deeper part of our advancement work will have us working with municipalities and LCCs around opioid mitigation funding, regionalization and supporting partnerships between LCCs and local and statewide cross-sector partners.

Creative Experiences Co-managed with the Organizations and Artist & Youth teams. Please see the grants memo for full details about FY26.

Cultural Districts. Please see the grants memo for full details about the Cultural Districts Initiative grants.

Cultural Facilities Fund

In May, MassDevelopment voted to finalize this year's grant recommendations.

The grant recommendations include Capital; Feasibility and Technical Assistance and Systems Replacement Plan Grants. The grants broke down as follows:

- 54 - Capital Grants: \$6,308,000
- 12 - Feasibility and Technical Assistance Grants: \$316,000
- 8 - Systems Replacement Plan Grants: \$69,500

Totaling 74 Grants: for \$6,480,500

The Fund received 198 eligible applications the December 19, 2024, deadline. The requests were as follows:

- Capital Grant requests: 161
- Feasibility and Technical Assistance Grant requests: 29
- Systems Replacement Plan Grant requests: 8

The total dollar request to the Fund was \$21.5 million and the combined total development costs of all projects was \$502 million.

In July, the Healy Administration authorized \$10 million for CFF in the FY26 capital spending plan. Staff are working with our partners at MassDevelopment to craft the guidelines and application for the next round of funding.

Advancement: Conducted a Mass Municipal Association Webinar “Adapting Public Buildings for Creative Uses” featuring Harwich, Easthampton and Dedham adaptive reuse projects.

Met with Skanska Development re: a community arts component of their Longwood Place project.

Grants Management System Team

The Grant Systems Team of the Mass Cultural Council supports the agency’s grantmaking via technical expertise of our grants management system (GMS). We are responsible for database management, reporting, technical grant application support, and providing customer service/training both internally and externally. We also contribute to policy, program design, and implementation of grant programs. This three-person team consists of two Grants Management System Officers who work with the Senior Director of Program Operations. We are thrilled to report that after a vacancy on the team, we will be joined by a new Program Officer, Allie Rosenthal in early September! Allie comes to us with 5 years of experiences as a System Administrator of several Grants Management Systems.

In collaboration with the Executive Office, we launched **Advancement Tracking** in GMS. They will use this feature to track external contacts, meetings and engagements.

In collaboration with Public Affairs, we generated and published **FY25 Legislative Funding Lists** for our website and to share out.

We continue to **review the system for enhancement opportunities** to make user experience better and to pull data more intuitively.

Organizations

The second cycle of Operating Grants for Organizations launched in February 2025, with the application deadline in April 2025. We received 368 eligible applications, out of a total of 465 received. Internal (staff) and external reviewers scored the applications, and a list of recommended grantees will be available for the August Council meeting.

In FY25, we introduced the Financial Health Analysis process, which used data from the publicly available non-profit tax forms to assess financial health indicators for the Operating Grants for Organizations grantee organizations. For FY26, we expanded this work to include the new cycle of Operating Grants, and the continuing Portfolio grantees. Grant amounts are increased for organizations that are determined to be experiencing financial stress. 86% of the grantees are included in the review, omitting the programs that are Cultural Affiliates – programs of larger, not eligible organizations. The data indicates that an increasing percentage of organizations were facing financial challenges through FY24. We plan to continue this work in future years so that we can track the financial indicators over time.

Creative Experiences: Co-managed with the Communities and Artist & Youth teams. Please see the grants memo for full details about FY26.

Gaming Mitigation: For FY25, we changed the Gaming Mitigation program to be a 2-year grant program, which means that there will not be an open application cycle in FY26. Instead, grantees will complete an Annual Report (due in November 2025, and currently being developed by the Lillian Lee, Gaming Mitigation Program Officer) in which we collect the formula funding factors needed to calculate FY26 grant amounts and verify continued eligibility. We anticipate there being \$3.4 million available for the FY26 grant program and will present the full funding list at the February Programs Committee meeting.

Card to Culture: Program Officer Lindiana Flores has been steadily enrolling new organizations into the Card to Culture program since its reopening in November of 2024. She has been working with interested applicants to ensure their programming aligns with Card to Culture's equitable practices and guidelines and welcomed back organizations that had previously participated in the Card to Culture program.

There are now 565 organizations participating in the program, and the list is growing due to the ease of the application rolling deadline. It is expected that Card to Culture will reach 600 participating organizations before the end of the year.

Advancement: The Organizations team curates a list of opportunities and resources for organizations, which are shared through monthly postings on the agency website. Program Officer Lillian Lee leads this monthly project.

Lindiana Flores is assisting with advancement efforts, meeting with cross-sector agencies like MassHousing to increase awareness of the Card to Culture program and the discounts available to residents living in low-income residential housing.



Power of culture

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless
Dt: August 19, 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 (which have been recommended for approval by the Programs Committee) describe the FY26 grantmaking in more detail. In all cases, staff is requesting the Council accept the recommendations of the Programs Committee and approve the following requests at its August 19 meeting

All grant allocation amounts below are based upon the Council's approval of the FY 26 Spending Plan.

**** 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 9 (d)(i)-(vii))

To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 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 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 9(e))

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee
Dt: August 19, 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 and we are recommending 398 grants. 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**.

The list of 398 recommended FY26 grantees is 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 9(f)(i))

To: Mass Cultural Council

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons

Re: Cultural Districts Initiative

Dt: August 19, 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 FY25. 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 9(f)(ii))

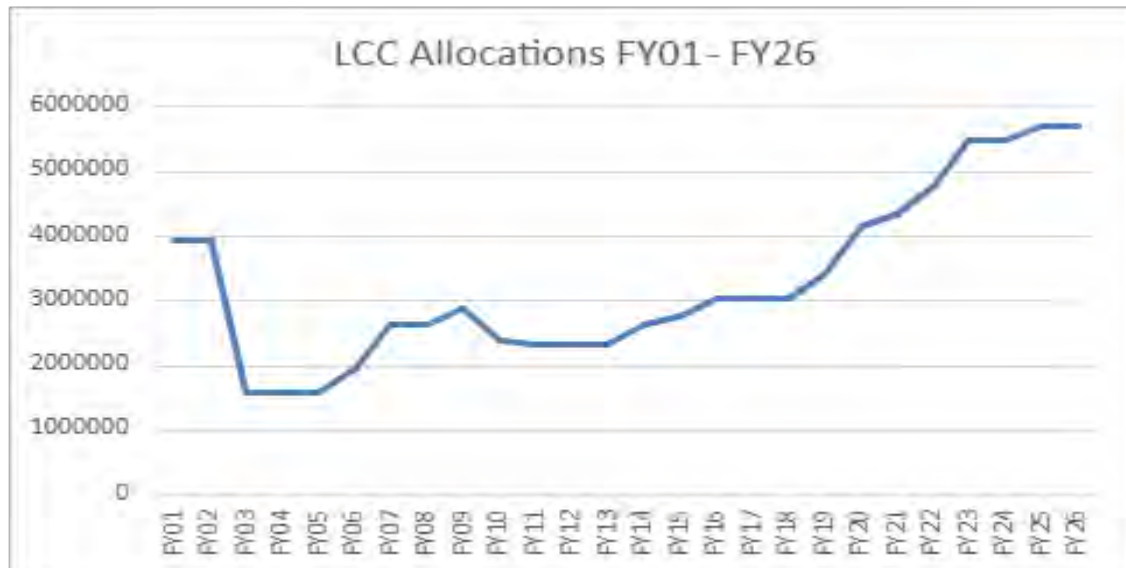
To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 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 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 for 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 9(f)(iii))

To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 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 their 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 Council approve 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 FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any unused funds to other grant programs.

YouthReach

(Agenda Item 9(g)(i))

To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 2025

Re: FY26 YouthReach Extension Grants

Summary. We recommend awarding 75 current YouthReach programs, FY26 YouthReach Extension Grants totaling \$1,870,000. This represents level funding for the program. However, award amounts vary by grantee and range from partial awards between \$8,200 and \$25,600 due to the cap (described below) to the full award amount of \$26,550, which is an increase compared to the FY25 \$22,000 YouthReach awards.

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 FY23-25 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.

As a result of the cap, 13 organizations will receive less than the full YouthReach award amount of \$26,550. The grantee list and list of YouthReach Programs that were not eligible for extensions grants is 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 9(g)(ii))

To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 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 can 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(h)(i))

To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 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 current 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(h (ii)))

To: Mass Cultural Council

Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Charles Baldwin

Dt: August 19, 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(h)(iii))

To: Mass Cultural Council

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

Dt: August 19, 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.

FY26 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 FY26, 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.



Power of culture

To: Mass Cultural Council
 From: Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director
 David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
 Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
 Date: August 19, 2025
 Re: **FY26 BUDGET AND PROGRAM ALLOCATION SPENDING PLAN**

Following this page is our proposed budget and program allocation spending plan for FY26. This plan was presented to the Executive Committee on August 6, 2025, and received a recommendation for approval by the full Council. Additionally, the FY26 grant recommendations for most Mass Cultural Council grant programs were presented to the Programs Committee on the same date, which also recommended approval by the full Council. We now submit the FY26 Spending Plan and related Grant Recommendations for review and approval by the full Council.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT AND COMPLIANCE

The agency's legislative mandate requires that at least 75% of the Line Item 0640-0300 appropriation (\$26,975,152) be allocated to grantmaking. For FY26, this establishes a minimum grantmaking threshold of \$20,231,364. Mass Cultural Council's FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Spending Plan exceeds this requirement, dedicating \$27,095,983 to grantmaking, representing 134% of the statutory minimum.

REVENUE SUMMARY

Mass Cultural Council's total projected revenue for FY26 is \$33.8 million, sourced from the following:

- State Appropriations and Earmarks – \$27.0M
- Chapter 23K Gaming Funds (Estimated) – \$5.1M
- MassDevelopment for Cultural Facilities Fund – \$354K
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) – \$1.3M total, including Basic State Plan, Education, Underserved Communities, Folk Arts, Poetry Out Loud, Art & Health, and America250
- Harry Rice Trust (Estimated) – \$64K

The FY26 state appropriation allocates \$26,975,152 to support Mass Cultural Council operations, representing near-level funding compared to the prior fiscal year. For context this includes:

- \$26,045,152 for core operations
- \$930,000 for 19 legislative earmarks that fund specific arts and cultural projects across the Commonwealth. The budget includes a funded earmark sponsored by Senator Paul Mark, Chair of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural

Development, which provides a \$25,000 honorarium to support the Commonwealth's first-ever Poet Laureate.

We extend our appreciation to Governor Healey, the Legislature, and key committee chairs for their continued support of the cultural sector and investment in the arts across the Commonwealth.

GRANT PROGRAM ALLOCATIONS

- Organizations – \$7.2M (28%)
- Artists & Youth – \$4.2M (16%)
- Communities – \$6.57M (25%)
- Equity and Inclusion – \$4.04M (15%)
- Advancement – \$687K (3%)
- Other Grants (Gaming and Trust) – \$3.46M (13%)

MASSACHUSETTS GAMING FUND (CHAPTER 23K)

As in prior years, and in accordance with M.G.L Chapter 23K, 2% of the Commonwealth's share of gross gaming tax revenues is allocated to the Massachusetts Cultural and Performing Arts Mitigation Trust Fund, which is administered by Mass Cultural Council. This program is intended to mitigate the impact of casino gambling on nonprofit performing arts organizations by helping offset the competitive challenges they face in booking touring artists and performers due to the presence of nearby gaming establishments. Accordingly, the FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Spending Plan includes \$5.1 million for the Gaming Mitigation Grant Program.

Of the total \$5.1 million:

- \$4.6 million will be awarded as grants to eligible nonprofit performing arts centers
- \$356k will support administrative and outreach activities

The funding draws from a combination of existing and projected revenues from the Commonwealth's share of casino tax revenue. Mass Cultural Council seeks approval to utilize:

- \$2,580,414 in available funds as of June 30, 2025
- \$2,545,166* in anticipated new revenue by December 31, 2025

*Please note the \$2,545,166 allocation is a conservative estimate based on year-to-date gaming tax receipts and current revenue trends, and while contingent on actual collections through the first half of FY26, any surplus revenues will be carried forward.

CULTURAL FACILITIES FUND

The Commonwealth's FY26 Capital Plan includes \$10M for the Cultural Facilities Fund grant program, which is administered in partnership with MassDevelopment. Mass Cultural Council receives an annual allocation of \$350,000 to support program administration. The FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Spending Plan reflects a total of \$354k in available administrative funds, which includes a \$4k carryforward of unspent funds from prior years.

ADVANCEMENT INVESTMENTS

As part of its broader advancement strategy, Mass Cultural Council is committed to strengthening the cultural sector through innovative partnerships, cross-sector initiatives, and investments that extend the reach and relevance of arts and culture statewide. The FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Spending Plan includes the following priorities:

- **Catalyzing Investment to open Arts Benefit Market** – funding to connect Massachusetts employees with arts and cultural benefits that enhance well-being, creativity, and workplace engagement.
- **NEA Art & Health Project** – a federally funded initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts focused on the intersection of arts and public health. This grant supports nonprofit organizations, and state entities in promoting and advancing the ArtPharmacy program. Additional details will be shared at the October Council meeting.
- **MassChallenge and Higher Education** – details will be shared at the October Council meeting. Set aside funding to support two initiatives: one to elevate creativity as a vital component of the innovation economy, and another to advance a collective agenda for integrating business and civic leadership training into post-secondary arts degree programs.
- **Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council (CPDAC)** – Funding to support CPDAC’s work, including research and stakeholder convenings that inform future cultural policy.
- **STEAM Advisory Subcommittee** – Funding to support the agency’s advisory subcommittee tasked with integrating arts into STEM education and workforce development strategies.
- **MassPort Artist Program** – A partnership with the Massachusetts Port Authority to create public art opportunities for Massachusetts artists in transportation hubs such as Logan Airport and regional seaports.
- **MITx Grant Initiative** – To strengthen the business acumen of the creative sector, continued funding will support the launch of a training program covering key topics such as finance, legal issues, marketing, branding, pricing, business models, negotiation, and civic engagement. The initiative also includes curriculum design and resource development to further support the creative sector.

EQUITY INVESTMENTS

Mass Cultural Council is committed to advancing equity, access, and inclusion across all areas of its work. In FY26, we are investing in targeted initiatives that deepen support for historically marginalized communities and further integrate equity into our grantmaking, operations, and advancement work. The FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Spending Plan includes the following priorities:

- **Access and Disability Learning Hub** – Continued funding to support our partnership with [Open Door Arts](#) to launch a central resource for cultural organizations to build capacity in accessibility and disability inclusion. The Hub supports learning, technical assistance, and implementation strategies that help organizations better serve individuals with disabilities. This initiative is aligned with the agency’s ongoing implementation of the multi-year [d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan](#).

- **Tribal Cultural Council Grant Program** – FY26 marks the second year of this grant program, which provides targeted support to Native American and Indigenous artists, cultural practitioners, and community-led initiatives. This grantmaking effort is part of a broader commitment to implementing the [Native American & Indigenous Peoples Equity Plan](#), which was developed with Indigenous stakeholders to promote culturally responsive funding, visibility, and inclusion.
- **Work Without Limits and Individual Artist Support** – Dedicated funding to provide enhanced technical assistance, navigation services, and accommodations for individual applicants—particularly those with disabilities and/or limited income. In partnership with [Work Without Limits](#) and through internal efforts, the agency aims to ensure equitable access to its grant programs for all eligible individuals.
- **Equity Advisory Taskforces – Funding to support the Native American & Indigenous Peoples Advisory Taskforce and the Disability Advisory Committee**, which provide community-informed guidance to advance the agency’s equity, access, and inclusion strategies. Comprised of leaders and stakeholders from across the Commonwealth, these taskforces help identify barriers, improve program accessibility, and ensure that agency policies and investments reflect the needs of historically marginalized communities. In FY26, both committees will play a central role in guiding the agency in implementing the [Native American & Indigenous Peoples Equity Plan](#) and the [d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan](#) by: (1) advising on grantmaking strategies and guidelines. (2) Identifying opportunities for expanded engagement with artists, cultural workers, and organizations. (3) Provide recommendations on staff training, and capacity-building efforts.



Power of culture

REVENUE	STATE FUNDING	GAMING*	CULTURAL FACILITIES FUND	NEA FEDERAL	MCC TRUST	TOTAL
FY26	26,975,152	2,545,166	350,000	1,310,938		31,181,256
FY25 CARRY OVER / TRANSFER IN	-	2,580,414	3,961		64,472	2,648,847
TOTAL REVENUE	26,975,152	5,125,580	353,961	1,310,938	64,472	33,830,103

*Estimated FY26 revenue

EXPENSES	STATE FUNDING	% TOTAL STATE FUNDING	GAMING	CULTURAL FACILITIES FUND	NEA FEDERAL	MCC TRUST	TOTAL	% TOTAL FUNDING ALL CATEGORIES
AA: SALARY	4,323,243	16%	213,907	167,822	23,679		4,728,651	14.0%
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	96,739	0.4%		4,603			101,342	0.3%
CC: CONTRACT STAFF		0%					0	0.0%
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	95,544	0.4%	80,878	63,453	8,953		248,828	0.7%
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	153,382	0.6%	21,645	22,583	2,368		199,977	0.6%
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	333,565	1.2%	37,500	37,500			408,565	1.2%
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	251,750	0.9%		10,000			261,750	0.8%
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	197,096	0.7%		48,000			245,096	0.7%
KK: NON-IT EQUIPMENT	5,000	0.02%					5,000	0.0%
LL: LEASES	13,299	0.05%					13,299	0.0%
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS (DETAILS BELOW)	20,225,573	75%	4,600,000		1,275,938	64,472	26,165,983	77.7%
PP: LEGISLATIVE EARMARKS	930,000	3%					930,000	2.8%
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	349,961	1%	2,539				352,500	1.0%
TOTAL EXPENSES	26,975,152	100%	4,956,469	353,961	1,310,938	64,472	33,660,992	100.0%

PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS (DETAILS)	STATE FUNDING		GAMING	CULTURAL FACILITIES FUND	NEA FEDERAL	MCC TRUST	TOTAL	% TOTAL GRANT FUNDING
ORGANIZATIONS							7,200,000	28%
Operating Grants (OGO & CIP) (23.25% revenue)	5,190,762		1,200,000		809,238		7,200,000	
ARTISTS & YOUTH							4,201,000	16%
Grants for Creative Individuals	2,270,000						2,270,000	
YouthReach	1,528,300				341,700		1,870,000	
National Endowment of the Arts: Poetry Outloud Huntington Theatre					25,000		25,000	
YAIN (Edvestors)	36,000						36,000	
COMMUNITIES							6,570,000	25%
Local Cultural Councils	5,700,000						5,700,000	
Cultural District Grants	870,000						870,000	
EQUITY AND INCLUSION							4,043,950	15%
Creative Experiences (F&P and Schools)	3,350,000						3,350,000	
National Endowment of the Art: America250 (creative experiences)					25,000		25,000	
Tribal Cultural Councils	103,950						103,950	
UP Innovation Fund	465,000						465,000	
Open Door Arts	100,000						100,000	
ADVANCEMENT							686,561	3%
New England Foundation for the Arts, Inc.	70,000						70,000	
Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy, Inc.	983,056						983,056	
NET CREDIT AND CARRY FORWARD	-756,947						-756,947	
	260,452						260,452	
MITx	10,000						10,000	
Massport Artist Program	5,000						5,000	
Catalyzing Grant to open Arts Benefit Market	10,000						10,000	
National Endowment of the Arts: Art & Health Project					75,000		75,000	
Mass Creative	30,000						30,000	
OTHER GRANTS							3,464,472	13.24%
Mass Cultural Council Trust (Grant Reserve/Uncommitted)						64,472	64,472	
Chapter 23k Funded Grants Gaming Mitigation Program			3,400,000				3,400,000	
TOTAL GRANTS	20,225,573		4,600,000	0	1,275,938	64,472	26,165,983	100%

AA: SALARY	We currently have 39 full-time employees and expect to fill 3 backfill vacancies in FY26. Payroll projections include a 2% cost of living increase on July 13, 2025, and another 2% cost of living increase on January 11, 2026, for unionized employees per their collective bargaining agreement. Managers received the July 13, 2025 2% cost of living increase; however, under current executive branch guidance, they are not scheduled to receive the January 11, 2026 cost of living increase this fiscal year.
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	This line item covers reimbursements for work-related employee expenses, including in-state travel for meetings, conferences, professional licensing, and similar activities. Out-of-state travel expenses are also included but require Council preapproval.
CC: CONTRACT STAFF	
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	This line covers payroll tax for staff salaries. It also includes fringe and indirect charges related to federal or state trust-funded salaries or contracts. Several salaries are paid from a trust account for the Cultural Facilities Fund and a casino tax revenue trust for employees managing the Gaming Mitigation Program or "organizational support" from Gaming Revenues under the Gaming Law.
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	This line covers administrative costs, including Commonwealth chargebacks for accounting and payroll systems/services, office supplies, utilities, printing, postage, membership fees, subscriptions, event-related expenses, staff training, credit card purchases, and costs related to grant program panels.
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	This line reflects our annual office lease (\$387K) and utility expenses. We are paying the current rental rate for the first six months of the fiscal year, and the increased rate for the second six months of the year.
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	This line includes expenditures related to outside attorneys, mission moments, event speakers, program consultants, advisors, and stipends for taskforce participation.
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	This line covers costs for photographers, auxiliary services, staff trainers, videographers, audio-visual providers, language or ASL interpreters/accommodations, grant reviewers, and program panelists/readers.
KK: NON- IT EQUIPMENT	This line covers purchases of non-IT equipment, such as office furniture and equipment, as well as ADA accommodation needs.
LL: LEASES	This line covers all non-IT equipment lease agreements, including copier and postage meter leases, as well as rental car expenses for staff travel.
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS & EARMARKS	A detailed grant allocation list is included in this packet.
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	This line includes costs for information technology needs such as the grants management system, ISP Service Retrofit, technology service providers, phone services/charges, laptop lease, web development, and Commonwealth chargebacks for IT services. Specific to FY26 included are planned upgrades to the agency's network infrastructure.



Power of culture

BUSINESS OPERATIONS UPDATE

AUGUST 2025

- Mass Cultural Council's current office lease is set to expire in January 2026. I'm pleased to share that the Commissioner of DCAMM has approved our request to extend our lease at our current location. The next step is for DCAMM's legal team to draft the formal lease extension, which we expect to receive in the coming weeks. Once finalized, it will be routed to Dave and me for review before being sent to the building's management for their review and signatures. As part of the lease extension, the Council will receive rent credits that will be applied monthly, effectively reducing our cost per square foot. This agreement represents a strong outcome for the agency, providing both cost stability and predictability over the next five years.
 - Current lease: \$332,010 annually (\$45.13/sq. ft.), expiring January 2026
 - New lease extension (5-year term): \$450,000 annually (\$47.44/sq. ft.)
 - Net increase: \$2.31 per square foot
 - Budget impact: In FY26, the agency's lease renewal results in a \$55,000 increase in annual rent due to the expiration of the current lease and commencement of a new one within the same fiscal year. The total lease cost represents approximately 1.2% of the agency's spending plan.
 - Overall improvement: Re-painting of the premises, card access system, and temperature sensors
- On December 10, 2024, the Office of the State Auditor notified us of its intent to conduct a Performance Audit Update of Mass Cultural Council. Since that time, we have held weekly meetings with the audit team and have provided the requested Excel files, documents, screenshots, and supporting materials. The auditors are currently reviewing the submitted materials, and we continue to provide additional documentation as requested. There are no significant updates to report at this time, and we will keep the Council informed.

- The FY25 accounting year is being closed out, which involves finalizing all financial activities and ensuring every transaction is accounted for. The new FY26 accounting year is being set up by establishing contracts to ensure the smooth operation of the agency. This involves negotiating and finalizing agreements with various vendors, and coordinating with departments, and ensuring all contractual obligations are aligned and in compliance.
- We have completed our annual update of Mass Cultural Council's Financial Policies and Procedures, which was last revised on August 8, 2024. This updated document includes the revised travel guidelines approved at the Executive Committee meeting on October 12, 2023, along with policies related to credit card use, purchasing goods and services, internal controls, fraud mitigation and prevention, and cybersecurity. The document is a living internal document that will be updated by staff as needed, no less than annually. Many of these are updates designed to clarify or reinforce existing practices or updates to our internal policies:
 1. **Interdepartmental Service Agreement (ISA):** Confirms that MCC follows the State Comptroller's ISA policies and has not developed a separate internal policy.
 2. **Record Retention and Audit Readiness:** Establishes that all financial records must be retained per the Commonwealth's Records Retention Schedule and kept audit-ready.
 3. **Business Continuity and Financial Risk Management:** Outlines steps for maintaining uninterrupted financial operations during emergencies, including cross-training, secure data backup, and coordination with state partners.
 4. **Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Regulation on Employee Reimbursements:** In line with IRS regulations, reimbursement requests submitted 120 days or more after the expense is incurred will be treated as taxable income and subject to all applicable payroll taxes.
 5. **Updated Meal Hours Policy:** Revised to align with our internal meal period policy found the handbook
- The Executive Committee approved five travel requests under the Mass Cultural Council's Out-of-State Travel Policy. Each trip was determined to provide a clear public benefit, advance the Council's Strategic and Equity Plans, and represent a cost-effective use of resources. All required Travel Authorization Forms, Procurement Request Forms, and State Ethics disclosures are on file. **Total Approved Travel Costs: \$8,931**
 - Michael Bobbitt – Robert J. Thompson Eastern Leadership Academy, Philadelphia, PA (8/24–8/28) – \$600
 - Dan Blask – 2025 State Arts Agency Arts Education Managers Professional Development Institute, Des Moines, Iowa (9/16-9/18) – \$756

- o Michael Bobbitt – ASLA Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA (10/10–10/12) – \$1,400
- o Kathe Swaback – Creating Healthy Communities Convening, Newark, NJ (10/14–10/16) – \$1,075
- o Cathy Cheng-Anderson – Strategic Human Resources Conference, Bretton Woods, NH (10/26–10/28) – \$1,500
- o Michael Bobbitt & David Slatery – NASAA Executive Forum, Omaha, NE (11/11–11/13) – \$3,600

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES UPDATED AUGUST 2025

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PURCHASING OF GOODS AND SERVICES

This policy outlines the procedures for purchasing goods and services at the Mass Cultural Council. It aims to ensure efficient, transparent, and responsible procurement processes, complying with relevant laws, regulations and practices set forth by the Commonwealth's Office of Supplier Diversity and State Comptroller's Office.

1. The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for all purchasing, payroll, grants and partnership payments, accounting, and budgets for Mass Cultural Council, including establishing an internal control structure with written procedures and sufficient oversight to effectively manage all financial activities and monitoring of compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
2. The Fiscal Operations team centrally manages the procurement process of all goods and services required by the Mass Cultural Council, including all purchasing mentioned in the "Out of State Travel policy". The team ensures that all equipment, supplies, and services are purchased at the best value without sacrificing the quality or personal safety of the product or service. The team stewards responsible spending by:
 - Ensuring procedures for soliciting and evaluating bids include clear criteria for selection and awarding contracts to ensure the best value and quality for the Council.
 - Acquiring goods and services in a timely and economical basis

- Using Statewide Contracts as frequent as possible
 - Maintaining cooperative relationships with our vendors
 - Regular monitoring and evaluation of procurement activities.
3. The Mass Cultural Council is committed to engaging a diverse and inclusive supplier base and promoting environmentally sustainable purchasing practices. Our efforts include increased outreach to diversify our suppliers and procuring eco-friendly products and services to support environmental sustainability.
 4. All purchases and contracts are executed by the Chief Financial Officer to attest budgetary availability and review of contractual obligations.
 5. Any purchase or contract committing more than \$25,000 (other than grants or other contracts specifically approved by the Council in a vote at a public meeting) is approved by the Executive Director.
 6. Any contract or expenditure of funds that causes more than a 10% increase in any subsidiary lines of the fiscal year budget approved by the Council (i.e. Lines AA to UU) are approved by the Chair and reported to the Council.
 7. The Business Operations team receives comprehensive training in Commonwealth procurement practices to ensure they are well-versed in policies, procedures, ethical standards, best practices, and proper record-keeping for audit purposes. Additionally, no individual is granted access to any part of the accounting or payroll systems without completing adequate training and demonstrating the ability to make accurate, detail-oriented entries.
 8. All employees involved in procurement must conduct their activities ethically and avoid any conflicts of interest. Employees must disclose any potential conflicts of interest and recuse themselves from the decision-making process if necessary to maintain integrity and transparency.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS PROCUREMENT CARD PROGRAM

The Commonwealth's Procurement Card (P-Card) Program is managed and regulated by the Office of the Comptroller's Commonwealth Procurement Card Policy and Procedures. Each transaction made using the procurement card, a method of payment, complies with the aforementioned policy governing the purchase of goods and services.

1. Cardholders of the procurement card program are approved at the discretion of the Executive Director. The Chief Financial Officer may

authorize additional employees to receive a P-Card if it is deemed necessary. Department Card holders review and sign the Commonwealth Procurement Card Use Employee Agreement.

2. Employees assigned a P-Card shall have an initial limit of \$1,500. Increased limits must be approved by the Chief Financial Officer, and a request must be made to the State Comptroller's Office.
3. The per-transaction limit shall not exceed \$1,000. In cases where circumstances warrant a higher transaction limit, exceptions may be authorized on a transaction-by-transaction basis with the approval of the CFO via the procurement request form.
4. The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for ensuring that sufficient funds are encumbered to cover the charges anticipated under all cards issued to Department Cardholders. At the beginning of each budget year the Chief Financial Officer projects the P-Card expense for the fiscal year and will review it on a quarterly basis to ensure sufficient funds are available to cover anticipated costs. The fiscal team carefully monitors charges and payments monthly against amounts encumbered.
5. The P-Card may not be used to avoid competitive procurements. All procurement card purchases must be preapproved by the Chief Financial Officer by submitting a Procurement Request Form. Itemized receipts are obtained for each transaction placed on the procurement card and documentation is retained for monthly reconciliation, payment, and audit purposes.
6. Allowable expenses for P-Card use include the following:
 - Airline, transportation, ticket payments
 - Conference or training registration and membership fees
 - Gasoline for rental vehicles
 - Hotel/lodging accommodations
 - Business related telecom, and utilities costs
 - Emergency purchases of office supplies, equipment etc.
 - Catering services, and individual meals up to the allowed amounts
 - Recruitment Costs
 - Subscriptions
7. Per Comptroller's policy, P-cards cannot be used to pay non-incorporated entities. P-Cards are not permitted for:
 - Cash

- ATMs
- Checks
- Gift Cards
- Alcohol
- Personal Use
- Legal Services
- Medical Services

8. The Cardholder shall inform vendors that the Commonwealth is a Tax-Exempt entity and that items purchased are NOT to be taxed. The Cardholder should not accept payments which include Massachusetts sales or meal tax. On the hologram side of the cards the words "MA TAX EXMPT ID 046002284" are embossed.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL SERVICE AGREEMENT (ISA)

Mass Cultural Council adheres to the policies and [procedures](#) established by the State Comptroller for the execution, monitoring, and amendment of ISAs. These state-level policies are comprehensive and designed to ensure consistency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility across all agencies. Given the completeness of these existing guidelines, MCC has not developed a separate internal policy, as we did not find it necessary to recreate or duplicate what already exists at the state level. To ensure compliance, all employees responsible for ISAs are made aware of and are expected to follow these state policies.

RECORD RETENTION AND AUDIT READINESS

To ensure accountability and transparency, all financial records—including procurement documentation, travel forms, invoices, receipts, contracts, and reconciliation materials—must be retained in accordance with the Commonwealth's Records Retention Schedule. The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for ensuring the agency's financial records are complete, organized, and readily accessible for audit purposes.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND FINANCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT

Mass Cultural Council recognizes the importance of maintaining uninterrupted financial operations during emergencies, system disruptions, or other unforeseen events. As stewards of public funds, the agency is committed to proactive planning and risk management to ensure resilience and stability. The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for maintaining a business continuity plan specific to the agency's financial and business operations. This includes ensuring

continued access to critical financial systems, data, and workflows during emergencies or disruptions.

- To reduce dependency on individual employees and ensure continuity of service, key members of the Business Operations Department are cross-trained in essential financial functions, including payroll, procurement, accounts payable, and grants management. This ensures coverage during absences, emergencies, or transitions.
- All financial records, payroll information, and procurement documentation, are backed up regularly and stored securely in accordance with Commonwealth policies. The agency maintains protocols for accessing financial systems remotely when necessary, using secure, encrypted connections and multi-factor authentication.
- During emergencies, the agency coordinates with the Executive Office of Administration and Finance (ANF), the Office of the State Comptroller (CTR), and other state partners to ensure alignment with statewide financial continuity and recovery plans.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL POLICY

Per Section 2, Line Item 0640-0300 of Chapter 41 of the Massachusetts Acts of 2019 (Massachusetts FY20 state budget), Massachusetts Cultural Council was required to establish a policy for pre-approving all out of state staff travel including any associated travel budgets. The Council adopted such a policy in January and under Section 54 of the Council's enabling act (M.G.L. Chapter 10 Sections 52-58A), the Council delegated the authority to pre-approve any such out-of-state travel to the Executive Committee.

This policy represents a restatement and update of the out-of-state travel policy and sets forth guidelines for out-of-state business travel and establishes criteria for the reimbursement of travel expenses. In compliance with the standards prescribed by the State Comptroller's Office, Operational Supplier Diversity Office, and Executive Office for Administration and Finance, this policy mandates the maintenance of economic efficiency and cost-effectiveness in its application.

1. All travel must have a clear public benefit for the Mass Cultural Council and have a direct benefit to an employee's essential job functions.
2. Out-of-state travel requests will be sent to the Executive Committee before its scheduled meetings. The Executive Committee will consider and decide upon such requests and then inform the Council of any approvals in the subsequent Council meeting.
3. The agency is responsible for maintaining documents including the Travel Authorization Form, any required State Ethics disclosure forms, and

Procurement Request Form. No expenses or reimbursements detailed in this form shall be approved unless they are consistent with applicable provisions of statute and this guidance. While these forms are primarily for internal record-keeping, they may be provided to the Executive Committee and Council as needed but will not be routinely submitted for review.

4. For this policy "Out of State Travel" excludes travel within New England (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut), unless it involves airfare, overnight accommodations, or registration fees over \$800. In exceptional cases where a quorum of the Executive Committee cannot be assembled for travel approval within a reasonable period of time, the Chair of the Council can grant approval. This decision must be reported at the next Council and Committee meetings.
5. Mass Cultural Council employees receiving travel subsidies from external entities, are required to comply with state ethics regulations as well as this policy. This requires the employee directly consult with the State Ethics Commission and may require the submission of any required disclosure and determination forms as stipulated in Commission regulations such as 930 CMR 5.08(2)(d)1.

Any forms which are required to be disclosed to the employee's "appointing authority" must be submitted to the Deputy Executive Director and the Chief Financial Officer both for record-keeping and to ensure adherence to state conflict of interest laws. Furthermore, travel fully subsidized by an external entity, which has been appropriately disclosed and approved under ethics law and does not involve the use of agency funds, is exempt from the Council/Executive Committee's pre-approval process. However, such travel must be reported at the subsequent meetings of the Executive Committee and Council.

6. Except for mileage reimbursement for private vehicles, employees are expected to submit corresponding itemized receipts showing the vendor's name, description of purchase/s and date for all purchase/s they seek reimbursement/s for. Eligible reimbursements include:
 - Economy/coach airfare and ground transportation (train, bus, taxi, ridesharing services) including reasonable tips not more than 20% of the fare.
 - Economical hotel and lodging considering proximity to the business destination and personal safety.
 - Conference fees

- Private auto-mileage: \$0.67 /mile.
- Parking and tolls
- Car rental arrangements
- Purchase of gas for car rental
- Meal reimbursement following federal guidelines set-forth by the [General Services Administration \(GSA\)](#):

BREAKFAST:	\$13.00 (applicable period 3:01 to 9:00AM)
LUNCH:	\$15.00 (applicable period 9:01AM to 3:00PM)
DINNER:	\$26.00 (applicable period 3:01 to 9:00PM)

7. Parking tickets, fines, valet service, personal expenses, alcohol related expenses, entertainment, newspapers, magazines, laundry services, travel accident insurance, change fees for non-emergency personal reasons, pre-check fees, and any related expenses are the responsibility of the employee and will not be reimbursed.
8. Per IRS requirements, reimbursement requests submitted 120 days or more after the expense was incurred will be treated as taxable wages to the individual receiving the payment and subject to all applicable employee and employer payroll taxes. Reimbursement requests submitted after 120 days will be accepted, however taxes will be withheld, and will be added to the taxable gross income on the employee's W-2.

INTERNAL CONTROL PLAN

As a state agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Mass Cultural Council holds a unique position of trust and responsibility and are careful stewards of our public resources and assets. In compliance with Chapter 647 of the Acts of 1989, Mass Cultural Council has developed an internal control plan. The plan reflects our ongoing commitment to these principles:

1. We uphold the highest standards of integrity and ethical behavior, expecting every member of our team to embody these values in their work.
2. Our leadership and management teams provide effective oversight, ensuring that all operations align with our mission and values.
3. We maintain a clear organizational structure, defining roles, authority, and responsibility to facilitate efficient and responsible decision-making.
4. We invest in the development of our team to ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their roles.
5. We foster a culture where every team member understands their role in achieving our mission and is empowered to act responsibly.

FRAUD MITIGATION AND AWARENESS TRAINING

To ensure our employees understand the risks associated with potential fraud related to grantmaking and financial management, all employees are required to complete an online classroom Fraud Mitigation and Awareness training provided by the Office of the Comptroller as a condition of employment. The training educates staff on various fraud types and equips them with detection techniques and prevention strategies. Additionally, the training highlights important statewide hotlines for reporting fraud, waste, abuse, or illegal activities.

CYBERSECURITY MITIGATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM

To ensure our employees have the knowledge to safeguard our digital assets and information systems Mass Cultural Council has developed a comprehensive Cyber Security Mitigation and Training Program comprised of the following:

1. Annual cybersecurity trainings: The training sessions reinforce the critical role of cybersecurity in all our operations.
2. Monthly Cybersecurity Learning Campaign: A curated newsletter that covers topics such as data protection, secure communication practices, and current cyber threats, fostering ongoing awareness and vigilance.
3. Monthly Modern Workplace Technology Series: Training demonstrations on range of applications, platforms, methodologies, and skillsets, keeping staff up-to-date and proficient in technology.

ACCESS CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

The Chief Financial Officer serves as Mass Cultural Council's Department Security Officer as designated by the Office of the State Comptroller. They are responsible for managing and approving access and ensuring the security of our systems.

The Chief Financial Officer conducts quarterly reviews of employee access to the state's financial system, and payroll system. These reviews ensure that system permissions are appropriate and align with each employee's current job responsibilities, adhering to the principle of least privilege.

The Chief Financial Officer promptly updates or terminates access to reflect any changes in an employee's role or responsibilities, including promotions, department transfers, or other changes. Access is revoked for employees who have left the organization or whose contracts have ended, ensuring that all system credentials are disabled within twenty-four (24) hours, and physical access cards/keys are collected at offboarding.