



*Power of culture*

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

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

### **MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025**

#### **ONLINE MEETING**

**Executive Committee Members Present** were

Marc Carroll, Chair  
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair  
Ché Anderson  
Simone Early  
Julie Wake

**Staff Members Present** were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director  
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director  
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer  
Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations  
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs  
Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager  
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff

**Guests Present** were

Paul Burke, MA Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:01am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement. He then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their June 25 meeting and if they had he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Simone Early moved to approve the minutes; Julie Wake seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Cecil Barron Jensen and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2025 Executive Committee Meeting in the form presented.

**Prepared on 9/12/25**

The Chair then gave his report. A few weeks ago, he had the opportunity to meet with the Chairs of the New York and California state arts agencies. It was a valuable exchange of ideas and best practices, and it reaffirmed just how strong an agency Mass Cultural Council is. With no disrespect to our peers, he came away deeply impressed by the extraordinary work of the Agency's leadership team and staff. He plans to share more reflections at the full Council meeting. He also paused to extend condolences to colleagues at Jacob's Pillow who experienced a recent tragic event on their campus resulting in the death of a valued member of their staff. On a brighter note, the Chair was pleased to welcome a new Council Member, Tom Bernard, who will officially join us on August 19. Tom, who will take the seat previously held by Secretary Yvonne Hao, brings a wealth of experience, and we look forward to everyone meeting him at that meeting. Finally, the Chair welcomed **Paul Burke**, Senior Project Manager with the Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to the meeting. Paul was in attendance to provide an update on the Agency's office lease extension.

Paul shared that he has been working with David Slatery and Cathy Cheng-Anderson on the lease amendment and wished to provide a brief update on the process. The current 10-year lease is expiring, so the landlord was approached, and an extension was explored. The landlord was interested in continuing to have Mass Cultural Council as a lessee and provided a proposal for a 5-year extension, which is the statutory maximum beyond the original 10 years if it can be shown to be in the best interests of the Commonwealth. Paul conducted a cost-benefit analysis, which demonstrated that extending the lease up to 15 years was indeed in the Commonwealth's best interest. Based on that analysis, the team negotiated with the landlord. The landlord's initial proposal was a higher price, but after several rounds of discussion a competitive agreement was reached. As is typical in an extension, the team sought landlord improvements and a market-rate comparison. In this case, valuable improvements were secured, including a new card access system, an intrusion alarm, and a full repainting of the premises. The landlord also offered an allocation of free rent over the 5-year term. Since improvements were already included, we applied the credit toward reducing rent, which made the overall cost even more favorable. Paul's market analysis confirmed the rent was below market rates and therefore advantageous to the Commonwealth. In addition to savings, the extension avoids moving costs and operational disruptions. Paul presented this analysis to the DCAMM Commissioner, who approved it, subject to final review and execution. We are now drafting the lease amendment for consideration, and once approved, we will move forward with execution.

David added that the intention is to include the new lease numbers in the spending plan the Council will review and approve at the upcoming Council Meeting.

Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis thanked Paul for the detail and clarification on the process; Michael extended his thanks to Commissioner Baacke.

Marc asked Paul for more information about the security improvements, specifically the card system. Paul explained that it is a security system that will tie into the current alarm system. Each employee will be issued a key card or a fob that will grant them access to the office space. It will secure the space and track when people arrive. If an employee leaves Mass Cultural Council the card can be deactivated, no need to return a physical

key. Cathy clarified that the space already has an alarm system, and it was recently upgraded. The new system will lock some interior doors where computers and servers are stored. Cathy also shared that there is a video camera in place so while individuals will not need to use their key card to swipe out of the space, their departure is visible on the security camera; there will also be some temperature sensors added ensuring temperature and moisture levels are adequate throughout the office space.

There were no further questions. The Chair asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Michael noted that Ann shared her monthly report to all Council Members earlier this week and that includes a full list of recent meetings and engagements. Michael is pleased to share that activities for FY26 are well underway. The Agency has received NEA funding, and following consultation with the Healey Driscoll administration, we have accepted the award. As a precaution, we are distributing only 80% of organizational grant funds initially, holding back 20% in reserve in case of any changes.

Recent external engagements have included: a recording of the Circle Round podcast at Tanglewood, a keynote address for the Black Theater Network in Los Angeles, another keynote address for the Lehigh Valley Arts + Culture Summit, the NASAA Board Meeting in Washington, D.C., a Boston Art Review panel in Provincetown, and a series of workshops for Charlotte, NC's Blumenthal Arts. Michael will also speak at Building Healthy Communities presented by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, the Council of State Government's Eastern Leadership Academy, the American Society of Landscape Architects National Conference in New Orleans and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies' Executive Forum in Omaha, Nebraska.

Michael and the staff have also had excellent meetings with the Lodging and Restaurant Associations on a new campaign to hire local artists for work in restaurants and hotels, and with the Secretary of Transportation to explore several arts-related initiatives—conversations we will be following up on.

Finally, Michael shared that the Agency's MITx partners will be guest speakers at the upcoming Council meeting, where they'll provide updates on the arts entrepreneurship course scheduled to launch in January.

There were no questions for Michael; the Chair asked Bethann for her Public Affairs report.

Bethann shared that it had been a busy summer. She and Michael testified before the House Committee on Federal Funding, Policy and Accountability and the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development at an Informational Hearing on the impacts recent changes are having on tourism, arts, and cultural development in Massachusetts. It was a packed room of more than two dozen elected officials, who were both supportive and engaged. It was an excellent opportunity to thank them, acknowledge shared concerns, and emphasize that while we continue to monitor developments closely with our partners, Massachusetts remains in a strong position as we prepare our spending plan and launch programs. The following week, the Healey-Driscoll Administration's office for federal funds and infrastructure held a listening session focused on sector impacts; Dave spoke during this session. It was encouraging to see colleagues on Beacon Hill staying attentive to federal shifts and their implications.

Looking ahead, we expect a brisk pace of public hearings once the legislature returns. Two bills we helped file have not yet had hearings, but we anticipate testifying in September and October. Meanwhile, the Public Affairs team has been working hard to refresh our external communications tools. The website is being updated from FY25 to FY26 content, program guidelines are being finalized, and our printed materials are in production. Bethann thanked Dawn Heinen who has been managing the many updates to [MassCulturalCouncil.org](https://MassCulturalCouncil.org). After the Council meeting, the refreshed website will feature updated "Programs at a Glance" and other communication tools to better highlight what the Agency offers. Bethann is also excited to preview a new "Advancement" webpage at [mcc.org/advancement](https://mcc.org/advancement), created with the Advancement team. Finally, as a new approach, rather than hosting only program-specific events, Public Affairs is planning regional convenings in the fall and spring to celebrate all investments together. This format—something the Agency has done in the past—will allow us to host larger groups at events, foster broader connections, and spotlight the full scope of the Agency's impact. Council Members are encouraged to attend the events.

The Chair asked for clarification on the updates to the website Bethann mentioned and if the team is launching a new website. Bethann explained that it is not a new website but rather transitioning a large amount of information on the current website from FY25 to FY26 now that the new fiscal year has begun and the spending plan will soon be reviewed by the Council which will mean the launch of new grant programs and other initiatives.

There were no further questions, the Chair moved to the next agenda item – a presentation on the budget and program allocation plan for FY26.

Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer, presented the proposed FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Spending Plan, along with an overview of the related FY26 grant recommendations. She explained after the Executive Committee meeting, the FY26 grant recommendations for most Mass Cultural Council grant programs based on this plan will be presented to the Programs Committee. When approved, the plan and the recommendations will be voted on by the full Council on August 19, 2025. She noted that the agency's legislative mandate requires that at least 75% of the Line Item 0640-0300 appropriation of \$26,975,152 be allocated to grantmaking, establishing a minimum of \$20,231,364. The FY26 plan exceeds this requirement, dedicating \$27,095,983 to grantmaking—134% of the statutory minimum.

Cathy provided a revenue summary showing total projected FY26 revenue of \$33.8 million, comprised of \$27.0 million from state appropriations and earmarks, \$5.1 million in estimated Chapter 23K Gaming Funds, \$354,000 from MassDevelopment for the Cultural Facilities Fund, \$1.3 million from the National Endowment for the Arts across several programs, and \$64,000 from the Harry Rice Trust. She detailed that the state appropriation includes \$26,045,152 for core operations and \$930,000 for 19 legislative earmarks funding specific arts and cultural projects, including a \$25,000 honorarium for the Commonwealth's first Poet Laureate.

Cathy explained at high level the grant program allocations for FY26 are as follows: Organizations – \$7.2M (28%), Artists & Youth – \$4.2M (16%), Communities – \$6.57M (25%), Equity & Inclusion – \$4.04M (15%), Advancement – \$687K (3%), and Other Grants (Gaming and Trust) – \$3.46M (13%). Cathy also reviewed the Massachusetts Gaming

Fund (Chapter 23K), explaining that 2% of the Commonwealth's gross gaming tax revenues go to the Massachusetts Cultural and Performing Arts Mitigation Trust Fund. The FY26 plan includes \$5.1 million for the Gaming Mitigation Grant Program, with \$4.6 million for grants to eligible nonprofit performing arts centers and \$356,000 for administrative and outreach activities. Funding sources include \$2,580,414 available as of June 30, 2025, and \$2,545,166 in anticipated new revenue by December 31, 2025, with any surplus carried forward.

Finally, Cathy reported that the Commonwealth's FY26 Capital Plan provides \$10 million for the Cultural Facilities Fund, administered with MassDevelopment, and that Mass Cultural Council receives \$350,000 annually for administration. The FY26 plan includes \$354,000 in available administrative funds, reflecting the FY26 allocation plus a \$4,000 carryforward from prior years.

Cathy handed the presentation to Michael.

Michael shared that Advancement is a major area of opportunity for the Agency, and there are several exciting initiatives underway. One is the Arts Benefit initiative, which seeks to encourage the private sector to include arts access in employee benefits packages; the Agency is bringing on a consultant to support this work. Mass Cultural Council has also received **a \$75,000 grant** from the National Endowment for the Arts to expand its arts-and-health initiatives. In partnership with MassChallenge, Mass Cultural Council is developing a series of white papers and events to position creativity as a professional development tool. Michael is also working with higher education institutions to revise curricula to better integrate civics and business. In addition, the forthcoming STEAM Advisory Report will explore how the STEM Council can advance arts integration; some funding has been reserved in case additional resources are needed. Other initiatives include a pilot program with MassPort to bring live music to Logan Airport, as well as continued support for the **MITx project**, which is preparing to launch and requires modest additional investment.

Michael then turned the presentation over to Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations, who highlighted four key equity and access priorities for FY26. She began with the continued support of the Access and Disability Learning Hub—developed in partnership with Open Door Arts—which serves as a central resource for cultural organizations seeking training, technical assistance, and practical strategies to advance accessibility and disability inclusion. This work supports the multi-year d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan. The second priority is the second year of the Tribal Cultural Council Grant Program, which provides funding to Native American and Indigenous artists, cultural practitioners, and community-led initiatives, aligning with the Native American & Indigenous Peoples Equity Plan created in collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders. Third, Jen outlined dedicated investments in Work Without Limits and expanded in-house assistance to offer navigation services and accommodations for individual applicants—particularly those with disabilities or limited incomes—to ensure all eligible artists can participate in Mass Cultural Council's grant programs. Lastly, she described funding for the Native American & Indigenous Peoples Advisory Taskforce and the Disability Advisory Committee, both of which will help guide the implementation of the equity plans by advising on grantmaking strategies and guidelines, identifying opportunities to increase engagement with artists, cultural workers, and organizations, and recommending staff training and capacity-building efforts.

Cathy concluded the presentation by sharing several operational highlights. She explained that payroll adjustments will provide 2% cost-of-living increases for union staff in July 2025 and January 2026, and for managers in July 2025 only, in line with executive branch guidance. She also noted that rent is projected at \$387,000, with a rate increase anticipated mid-year, and that rent, and electricity together will account for approximately 1.2% of the FY26 budget. In addition, the plan calls for continued modernization and standardization of Mass Cultural Council's network infrastructure.

The Chair asked Michael to refresh memories and clarify what the MITx program entails.

Michael explained that MITx is MIT's social corporate responsibility platform, which offers free online courses in a wide range of subjects. Recognizing that the arts sector often lacks affordable access to business training, MIT faculty approached Michael about developing an arts entrepreneurship course. Initially designed for a small group of 25 participants, Michael was able to expand the idea by placing it on the MITx platform. Over the past year, he has worked with MIT's Sloan School of Management to adapt its pedagogy into coursework tailored for artists. The result is a high-quality, asynchronous virtual program that allows participants to learn at their own pace, with some opportunities for peer interaction. Because it will be available globally on the MITx platform, enrollment could reach hundreds of thousands of people. The course will be free to the arts sector, accessible on any device, and will provide participants with a certificate from MIT—a valuable addition to résumés and a tool for building entrepreneurial skills. Mass Cultural Council provided initial seed funding, with additional support from Eastern Bank, The Boston Foundation, and a few other funders. The course is slated to launch in January, and the Agency is planning a major outreach push to spread the word.

There were no further questions, so the Chair asked for a motion and a second to approve the budget and program allocation plan for FY26. Julie Wake moved to approve the plan; Che Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Cecil Barron Jensen and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that, the Executive Committee recommends that the Council approve for recommendation to the Programs Committee and full Council the FY26 Budget and Program Allocation Plan presented to the Executive Committee.

The Chair moved to the next item on the agenda: out-of-state travel requests. Cathy explained that all requests were outlined in Committee Members' packets. The requests total \$9K. Each one demonstrates a clear public benefit, directly supports the staff member's core job responsibilities, and aligns with the Agency's mission, strategic plan, and equity goals. They also represent a cost-effective use of resources. Dave noted that an updated version of the travel request memo had been sent to Committee Members; the Chair asked what the update was, and Dave explained that it was an additional request for Program Manager Dan Blask.

Ché Anderson asked if at the next meeting the Committee could discuss the current out-of-state travel policy. He would like there to be a higher cost threshold that would require staff to bring smaller requests before the Executive Committee. The Chair noted that the current policy requires out-of-state travel within New England above \$800 to be

approved by the Committee and any travel to states outside of New England. He recalled that two years ago when the policy was last reviewed, there was much discussion as to what the cost threshold should be. The travel policy will be added to a future agenda for discussion. The Chair then asked for a motion and a second to approve the current travel requests. Ché Anderson moved to approve the requests; Simone Early seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Cecil Barron Jensen and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the staff-recommended out-of-state travel requests presented to the Committee at the August 6, 2025 Meeting.

The Chair moved to the final item on the agenda: approval of the agenda for the August 19 Council Meeting. Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis noted that the year had a typo in it, Dave will fix this. There were no further questions or edits. Julie Wake moved to approve the agenda as amended; Simone seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Cecil Barron Jensen and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee approve the draft August 19, 2025 Mass Cultural Council Agenda as amended at the Executive Committee Meeting.

The end of the agenda had been reached and Marc, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:02am.