



Power of culture

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

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

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Thomas Bernard
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
Cecil Barron Jensen
David S. Kong
Anika Lopes
Diane Asadorian Masters
Allyce Najimy
Ashley Occhino
Ellice Patterson
Mark Snyder
Julie Wake

Also Present were guest speakers Jenny Larios Berlin and Ben Shields from the MIT Sloan School of Management and Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Christian Kelly, Sara Glidden and Erik Holmgren

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 9:04 am 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. Marc noted that the Council had heard at previous meetings that Michael and the team have been working to develop an arts entrepreneurship program in collaboration with the Sloan School of Management at MIT, so that joining the meeting today to tell us more about this collaboration are Jenny Larios Berlin, Lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management and Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Trust Center for MIT

Prepared on 9/12/25

Entrepreneurship and Ben Shields, Senior Lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management. Marc invited Jenny to begin their presentation.

Jenny began by noting that the team at MIT believed the language of arts was based on compassion and human understanding but also recognized that creators need financial support and understanding in order to follow and fulfill their talent. She thanked Michael for coming to them and talking and working through the idea of a course designed to support artists from a business perspective.

Other fields (namely science) need translation of ideas and concepts in order to further their work- foundations and investors won't fund ideas unless they understand them. The same is true of creative producers. They need a bridge from talent and concept to commercialization/financial support in the same way as scientists. That's what this course was designed for.

The question we raised was "what can we do to close the gap between talent and financing for creative individuals?" How can we empower creative people to live off and benefit from their talent? How can we bring what we've learned of business development to the creative sector? Jenny then introduced Ben to continue the presentation.

Ben thanked Jenny for discussing the why behind the MITx Arts & Entrepreneurship class and he was now going to discuss the how. Ben explained that they had worked directly with practicing artists to pull this course together so that the creative entrepreneur mindset would be at the center of the course. After thanking Michael again for his thought partnership, Ben presented the August 2025 visual pitch deck for the MIT Arts Entrepreneurship program (in the form of a PowerPoint presentation which is available upon request). Ben noted that the class is asynchronous and free but there would be an opportunity to obtain for a nominal \$25-50 cost an official certificate of completion from MITx. Ben noted that maybe there could be a waiver of that for people that came in through Mass Cultural Council.

At the end of the slide deck, Marc thanked Jenny and Ben, commenting that this seemed to be a such a helpful course and potentially a game-changer for the sector. And then asked for questions and comments from the Council.

Ashley Occhino asked if there was a cap on the number of participants, Ben said no – it was free and unlimited and designed for scale. Michael stated that he hoped there would be "book club" type group learnings where everyone could attend the course together on their phones.

Simone Early offered that she believed this was a great idea but wondered how they would determine whether students came in through Mass Cultural Council in terms of the certificate fee waiver. Ben said it's an option they are thinking about, and the logistics would need to be worked out.

David Kong mentioned he was a fellow MIT educator (from MIT Media Lab), congratulated his colleagues and stated he thought this was a wonderful course and asked about the "pure learning" piece versus the relational and community-building aspects. Ben replied that community was an important part of the course design. Peer assessment is a key component of any scaled class.

Mark Snyder was very impressed by the idea and felt that creatives and artists could benefit by learning more public relations and marketing skills.

Allyce Najimy asked if budgeting was a skill that was being taught in the course and would there possibly be a capstone project which could be a large showcase- a sort of Shark Tank type event?

Jenny indicated there will be a full module on budgeting and as part of the course there will be opportunities for share-outs in small groups. Haven't really thought how a large event would work with a course of this nature- would probably need additional funders for that.

Allyce mentioned a UMass sports marketing course with a Shark Tank type event and offered to share information.

Anika Lopes weighed in and shared she was also very excited about this opportunity and further added that she thought a Shark Tank type experience could "up the ante" a little.

Michael stated that we hoped thousands of artists would take advantage of this evergreen course so a specific event could be difficult. Jenny noted that they were running it initially as specific course in specific semester, but it would hopefully have a substantial enrollment.

Michael added how important it was that artists had been involved in the course design and that he believed that it would help with the translation of business terms in ways artists could appreciate. Michael noted there is often an "anti-commercialization" undercurrent in the creative sector and that he hopes this effort to join artistic creativity and entrepreneurship together with political power can overcome some of that.

Marc asked if people who may not have retained the knowledge from a particular session, was there a way to go back and relearn? Jenny indicated that the AI-embedded copilot could help with this, and Ben stated that students could continue to access the course materials even after the course had ended.

Ellice Patterson asked if there is any way for the artist/students to connect to the larger MIT network and maybe to a pipeline for larger opportunities. Jenny noted that this was an important point- the course will focus on how to identify potential resources and will focus in part on a specific activity the student is currently undertaking and yes there will be references throughout to other available MITx courses on business and entrepreneurship.

Marc said there appear to be no further questions and with a big reminder to everyone that this course is FREE, he thanked Jenny and Ben for their illuminating presentation and Michael and the staff for developing this project.

Marc then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the 165th Council Meeting & the April 22, 2025 Special Meeting of the Council included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve the minutes.

After motion made and duly seconded, by roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin Donna Haghighat and Rhonda Anderson were absent it was unanimously

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 .

Marc gave his Chair's report and began by introducing newly-appointed Council Member Tom Bernard. He asked Tom to introduce himself and Tom stated it was an honor to be appointed to the Council and that he had had a full orientation session from the staff earlier this month and he was inspired by the opening presentation by MITx and felt inspired by this the commitment to artists and the cultural sector that this initiative showed. Tom mentioned that he appreciated the arts, having worked at Mass MoCA more than 20 years ago and later as Mayor of North Adams was very familiar with the value of the arts. He strongly believed in the concept of regional equity and looked forward to representing the Berkshires.

Marc thanked Tom and mentioned that we have a stacked agenda today so would keep his report brief. The Executive Committee met on August 6 and was joined by a representative of DCAMM to discuss the Council's 5-year lease extension at its current location. He also mentioned that a few weeks earlier, he had met with the chairs of the California and New York arts agencies as part of a peer networking effort. He thought there should be more chairs talking to each other across state lines. He noted that Mass Cultural Council is well-respected nationally and that Massachusetts has a strong sector and strong staff who provide us with so much useful and necessary information. Hats off to Michael and the leadership team and the entire staff. Marc will continue to reach out to chairs around the nation.

Marc then noted he had recently seen Michael had been published for his stage adaptation of Make Way For Ducklings and offered his congratulations. Michael described his history with the play and the McCloskey family.

Marc concluded by referencing the upcoming calendar of meetings in the Council materials and lists of Committee assignments. He noted Tom would be assigned to a Committee shortly. He then asked Michael for the Executive Director report.

Michael stated that most of his report will be in the spending plan presentation later in the meeting but noted it has been a very productive summer for the agency. He reminded the Council that Ann Petruccelli Moon sends out monthly updates as to meetings he and/or Dave attended or will attend, and members should let us know if they want to know more or join. This is part of our ongoing plan to build and establish relationships across state government and other parts of the economy. We welcome any connections members have and would be willing to suggest or make introductions. Michael extended a warm welcome to Tom as a new council member. He stated that the agency has achieved all our goals under the current strategic plan so far. Michael referred to advancement activities (and to the Advancement Committee report included with the meeting materials), recognized the efforts of the new advancement team under Erik Holmgren and Carolyn Cole noted that creativity was connected to all parts of civic life. In the upcoming year, we will seek to turn the many connections we've established into objectives and goals,

Marc thanked Michael for his report and asked Bethann Steiner for the Public Affairs report.

Bethann noted that the recently enacted state budget had provided the agency with its largest appropriation ever. This summer, the agency has been asked to weigh in on current affairs- including a state house hearing about loss of federal funding in the arts and also at a webinar hosted by the Healey Administration's Federal Funds Information Office on the same topic. As we get closer to the end of the summer, there may be more hearings we are asked to participate in. Bethann extended her thanks to the Public Affairs team (Dawn Heinen and Christian Kelly) for working to rebuild the Agency's website with the new FY26 programs which the Council will be voting on later today. The team has also developed a new "Programs At A Glance" brochure which will be published after this meeting. There is also a new page on the website dedicated to Advancement and members are encouraged to visit and check it out. A big thanks to all members who have been attending our convenings and events. In this new fiscal year, we are restarting that effort, though this year we will focus on regional events as opposed to specific program-related events. These events will occur this fall and next spring.

Marc moved to the next item on the agenda and asked Michael to introduce the presentation on Mass Cultural Council's FY26 spending plan. Michael – joined by Jen Lawless and Catherine Cheng-Anderson – then presented an in-depth slide deck outlining the Agency's spending plan for the new fiscal year. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Marc thanked the staff at the end of the presentation

There were no further comments or questions for Michael, Jen, or Catherine and Marc asked Dave to review the Conflict-of-Interest procedures for FY26.

Dave explained that under state ethics law Council Members may not take official action pertaining to any organization in which they have a financial interest, employment, or board membership; and, rather than leaving the room for the vote on grant recommendations, their conflicts of interest are disclosed in the minutes, and this indicates that they take no part in the discussion or the vote on funding for any of those identified organizations. He asked Council Members to review conflicts of interest list in their materials and indicate if there are any updates and several members updated their disclosures. Tom Bernard disclosed he was affiliated with Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. Julie Wake also indicated she had a connection to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Dave said he would add both items to the conflicts list for purposes of the upcoming votes and he would send around an updated list right after the meeting.

Marc then moved to the next agenda item and asked Jen for the Programs update. Jen referred to the materials circulated and asked if there were questions. There were none and Marc then asked the Programs Committee to report on the FY26 Program recommendations. Julie as Co-Chair of the Programs Committee reported that they had reviewed and recommended the Program recommendations contained in the meeting materials.

Marc asked if there were any questions and there being none moved on to FY26 Spending Plan approval. Marc mentioned the Executive Committee had reviewed and recommended the proposed FY26 Spending Plan contained in the meeting materials and asked Catherine for her presentation.

Catherine referred to the materials which had been circulated and asked if there were any questions. There being none, Marc asked for a vote of the FY 26 Spending Plan and Program Recommendations. Upon motion duly made and seconded, by roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin, Donn Haghighat and Rhonda Anderson were absent, the Council approved the following

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

Ivan Espinosa-Madrigal

- a. New England Foundation for the Arts
- b. Institute of Contemporary Art

Julie Wake

- a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod
- b. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute

Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

Anika Lopes

- a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation

Ashley Occhino

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

Tom Bernard

- a. Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

Marc congratulated all and asked Catherine for the Business Operations report.

Catherine referred to the materials that had been circulated to the Council. She highlighted two items. As Marc had stated, we were in process of extending our current lease at 10 Saint James Avenue (which expires in January) for another 5 years. While the rent has increased by \$2.31 per square foot, as the DCAMM representative notes at the Executive Committee meeting, this is a very favorable deal in today's market. Secondly, Catherine noted that at the August 6 meeting, the Executive Committee had approved approximately \$8900 in staff out of state travel. Details are available in the meeting materials

There were no further comments or questions. Marc, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at approximate 10:45.