

Posted on 5/13/2026



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Council Meeting Book

One Hundred Sixty-Ninth Meeting of Mass Cultural Council

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

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Posted on 04/16/2026

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Agenda
One Hundred Sixty-Ninth Meeting
of Mass Cultural Council
Tuesday, May 19, 2026

1:00 – 2:00 PM

In-Person Meeting

Emerson Paramount Center
The Jackie Liebergott Black Box Theatre
559 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111

Meeting materials will be posted online under
[Governing Council Meeting Schedule](#)
“May 19, 2026, Council Meeting”
on Mass Cultural Council's website

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order – Open Meeting Law Notice
2. Minutes **Vote**
 - 2a. Minutes of the 168th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council – February 25, 2026
3. Chair's Report
 - 3a. Update and Projected Timeline for Executive Director Search
4. Acting Executive Director's Report
 - 4a. Equity Progress Report

- 4b. Advancement Report
- 5. Public Affairs Report
 - 5a. Legislative Update
- 6. Business Operations Report
 - 6a. Staff Out-of-State Travel Approved by Chair
 - 6b. Out-of-State Travel Policy
- 7. Program Operations Report
- 8. Adjourn

Vote



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Open Meeting Law Statement

(In-Person)

Please note that this meeting is an open meeting of a public body subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. A notice of this meeting, together with the agenda, was posted on Mass Cultural Council's website 48 or more hours ago (excluding weekends and holidays).

This meeting shall be open and accessible to all members of the public, except at such times when this body has voted to go into closed executive session under the Open Meeting Law.

This meeting is an in-person meeting taking place in an open public meeting place that is accessible to the public. It is being conducted under the Open Meeting Law as currently in effect, and there is no requirement for a public online or broadcast component.

Mass Cultural Council welcomes the public to attend its meetings in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, but any attempts to disrupt a meeting may result in the removal of the responsible party. This meeting is not a public hearing, and public testimony will not be taken. Individuals may not address the meeting without the permission of the Chair.

Any member of the public may record this meeting, provided that they do not interfere with the meeting as determined by the sole judgment of the Chair.

Draft minutes of the open session of this meeting shall be kept and shall be posted on Mass Cultural Council's website no later than 30 days after the meeting, provided that such minutes shall not be considered official until they have been approved by this body in open session. Individuals asserting a violation of the Open Meeting Law may file a complaint with this body within 30 days or with the Attorney General's office thereafter.



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**Mass Cultural Council
Resolutions
Tuesday, May 19, 2026**

Section 2 – Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Sixty-Eighth Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council dated February 25, 2026, in the form presented.

Section 6b – Out-of-State Travel Policy

RESOLVED: To approve the Agency's updated Out-of-State Travel Policy as presented to the Council at its May 19, 2026 meeting.



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Unofficial Draft Subject to Approval by the Council at its next meeting

Minutes of the 168th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Online Meeting

Council Members Present:

- Marc Carroll, Council Chair
- Jo-Ann W. Davis, Council Vice-Chair
- Ché Anderson
- Rhonda Anderson
- Emily Bramhall
- Thomas Bernard
- Vinny deMacedo
- Simone Early
- Donna Haghighat
- Cecil Barron Jensen
- Anika Lopes
- Diane Asadorian Masters
- Allyce J. Najimy
- Ashley Occhino
- Ellice Patterson
- Julie Wake

Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Present:

- David Slatery, Acting Executive Director
- Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
- Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
- Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
- Ann Petruccelli Moon, Acting Chief of Staff
- Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager
- Dan Blask, Program Manager
- Summer Confuorto, Program Officer

- Erik Holmgren, Manager of Advancement and Strategic Partnerships
- Colin Baylor, Grants Management System Officer
- Allison Rosenthal, Grants Management System Office

Also Present:

- Jordan Maynard, Chair, Massachusetts Gaming Commission
- Emily Ruddock, Executive Director, MASSCreative

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and asked Acting Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to read the Open Meeting Law Statement.

The Chair then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes from their last two meetings and if they had he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Tom Bernard moved to approve both sets of minutes. Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin, David Kong, and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the Minutes of the October 29, 2025 Council Meeting and the December 10, 2025 Special Council Meeting in the form presented.

Marc then noted that this was the first regular Council meeting since the departure of former Executive Director Michael J. Bobbitt. In January, Marc and Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis met with senior staff to discuss the executive director transition and created a Search Firm RFP Task Force comprised of members of the Executive Committee plus Council Members Rhonda Anderson and Ashley Occhino. Once finalized, the RFP will be sent out publicly with the goal of hiring a search firm to assist in the search for a new executive director. After that process begins, a new task force will be formed to oversee the selection of the next executive director.

Marc also reminded members about Creative Sector Day at the State House coming up on March 3 and encouraged them to attend. He noted that he is always impressed by the turnout each year. Registration is still open on the MASSCreative website.

Dave then provided the Acting Executive Director's update, noting that since January 1 he has been in the office meeting regularly with staff. The team is continuing to implement the FY26 spending plan while also actively engaged in discussions about the FY27 budget; Bethann and Dave recently met with the Chairs of the Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development to discuss the budget process. Dave also mentioned that in the State of the Commonwealth address the Governor highlighted arts and culture and then followed that up with a 5% increase to the Council's line item in her proposed FY27 state budget, but Bethann will speak more about that in the Public Affairs report. Over the past eight weeks he has attended a number of events. At an event earlier in January he spoke with Secretary of Economic Development Eric Paley about the newly established Competitiveness Council and the possibility

of creating an arts and culture subcommittee. He also referenced conversations with MassEcon, AIM, and the Charles River Chamber of Commerce, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that the broader business community sees and understands the cultural sector's role. At the Governor's Tourism Conference, Mass Cultural Council will participate in a panel discussion. Dave noted that Jen will provide a thorough Programs update later in the meeting, including an update on the Gaming Mitigation Fund; Dave thanked Gaming Commission Chair Jordan Maynard for attending the meeting. The applications for YouthReach and Creative Experiences are both currently open.

Dave then highlighted something he is particularly proud of: the Agency has recently met with representatives from two other states interested in learning about Massachusetts' work. Cathy will provide a full Business Operations report later in the meeting, but Dave shared that the Agency's lease for another five years in its current location is almost completed.

He then transitioned to the Advancement report, explaining that the Executive Search Task Force meeting had taken the place of the Advancement Committee on the calendar in January, so we are reporting today at the Council Meeting on the Agency's Advancement work. Advancement is a relatively new pillar of the Agency's work and was part of Michael Bobbitt's vision to position the arts and cultural sector as a visible and recognized resource in other policy areas across the Commonwealth. The goal is to ensure that the sector shows up in rooms where it previously was not present and becomes an expected participant in conversations. The effort is about leveraging resources from outside the sector and ensuring that arts and culture have a seat at the table in policy discussions.

Advancement and Strategic Partnerships Manager Erik Holmgren described Advancement work as taking the things the Agency already believes in and practices internally and extending them outward into other sectors. He noted that the Lieutenant Governor recently highlighted at a STEM Committee meeting that the sector is only beginning to tap into its potential. Two weeks earlier he attended a National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) convening in Washington focused on arts and health. During the opening keynote panel, speakers discussed the concept of arts prescriptions, something Massachusetts has been discussing for five or six years. He said it was encouraging to see that three additional states are now preparing to pursue similar work, demonstrating both the growing interest in arts and health and Massachusetts' leadership as a state arts agency in this area. He also mentioned an upcoming April 10 convening at UMass Amherst focused on arts and health that will include MA Dept. of Public Health Commissioner Robbie Goldstein.

Ché added that the arts should be seen at the center of every table and offered a shout-out to Bethann Steiner, thanking her and the Public Affairs team for focusing on these areas and for the work they are doing.

Marc asked a question about the two convenings in April. Erik clarified that the April 10 convening is being run by and will take place at UMass Amherst and will focus on arts and health. The second convening, on April 17 at Worcester State University, which is a Council effort, will bring together presidents and leadership from higher education institutions involved in the arts. That meeting will focus on gaps in alumni data and how to better track and retain arts graduates in Massachusetts.

Dave then noted that since 2020 staff has provided an equity report at every Council Meeting. The Agency continues to report progress, including the work of two advisory committees focused on the d/Deaf and Disabled and Native and Indigenous communities. He also highlighted ongoing work to improve and make fully accessible all of the Agency's documents and websites. He said additional details are included in written materials and encouraged members to direct questions to him so they can be routed to the appropriate staff member.

Bethann then provided the Public Affairs update. She thanked the Chair and stated that she would try to hit on some of the important topics the Chair, Dave, and Erik previously mentioned without taking up too much time.

The team is very pleased with how we are starting the FY27 state budget process. The Governor's recommendation for Mass Cultural Council is \$27.35 million, which is a 5% increase to our operating budget. H2 does not contain earmarks so this figure, if enacted, would be the highest operating budget in the history of the Agency, for which we are very grateful. We have met with our legislative partners and champions, and they are also quite pleased with this starting point. I would be remiss if I did not thank our partner in advocacy, Emily Ruddock of MASSCreative, who is here with us today as her organization circulated a thank you letter to the Governor and an advocacy letter to the House and Senate asking them to retain the Governor's recommendation in their budgets. Hundreds of people from the cultural sector signed this letter. Thank you, Emily.

Next week we meet with the House Ways & Means Chairman and will discuss our hope that the House budget retains the Governor's funding recommendation for the Agency, as well as again provide a \$25,000 funded earmark for the Poet Laureate stipend, which we successfully secured in FY26. We will also mention our "STEM to STEAM" bill which is pending review by the Committee as we hope it will advance this session. Further, we are expected to testify during a budget hearing in Barnstable on March 9.

Both our bills, STEM to STEAM and a proposed Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) amendment, have advanced from their first committees and are now under review by House or Senate Ways & Means. We hope they both are brought before the full Chamber and we are working with our sponsors and with the Committees to try to move these bills this session.

We have many events coming up this spring. Next week, as the Chair mentioned in his report, is Creative Sector Day at the State House - March 3.

Please join us and please register on MASSCreative's website. I am told there are more people registered this year than who attended last year, which is wonderful, this is a fun and exciting day on Beacon Hill.

Additionally, Public Affairs is ready to host regional grant celebrations - join us March 9 in Marblehead; March 23 in Holyoke; and March 30 in New Bedford. Thank you to Simone, Jo-Ann, and Ashley for joining us at these events and please we'd love all Council members to join us if able. Public Affairs looks forward to an event in April celebrating Card to Culture programmatic milestones and further grant celebrations in Worcester and Berkshire Counties in May.

As Dave and Erik mentioned, we are working closely with our partners at MIT to launch the Online Arts Entrepreneurship Program with MITx. The registration should launch today, and we will start marketing this new opportunity tomorrow widely.

She noted that since the last Council meeting Public Affairs has worked with the Program and Advancement teams to publish 37 Power of Culture blog posts - each telling the rich stories of our efforts, relationship building, investments, and successes. Through the blog and other digital channels, Public Affairs is taking the conversations happening across the Agency and sharing them externally with our stakeholders and our cross-sector partners. We do this as an effort to celebrate achievements and build momentum, helping to keep these initiatives moving forward and modeling the behaviors we'd like others in the sector to emulate.

The Public Affairs memo included in the meeting materials has a number of other updates about team projects, achievements, campaigns, and new digital tools. Bethann thanked Dawn Heinen, Carmen Plazas, and Christian Kelly for their hard work. She thanked the Chair and offered to answer any questions from the Council.

Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis shared that she will attend the upcoming grant celebration in Holyoke. There were no further comments or questions. The Chair asked Cathy Cheng-Anderson for her update.

Chief Financial Officer Cathy Cheng-Anderson shared that, as of the end of February, Mass Cultural Council is nearly eight months into Fiscal Year 2026. She reported that spending to date is aligned with the planned budget and noted that a steady increase in spending is anticipated through the remainder of the fiscal year. She also directed Council members to the spending breakdown included in their meeting packets.

Cathy announced the Commonwealth's launch of a new financial system, Mosaic, describing it as a major statewide modernization of the state's financial ledger system after 23 years. She explained that the system went live for Mass Cultural Council and all Commonwealth agencies effective this past Monday and noted that, over the next several months, staff will be engaged in training

and adjusting workflows while continuing to process grant payments and provide case management to grantees.

Cathy noted that, as with any system conversion, she expects temporary slowdowns while staff adjust to the new system. In anticipation of the change, she shared that the fiscal team worked extensively to process as many transactions as possible before the cutoff date in the old system. She also stated that she had reprioritized work and added support to the team during the transition. She emphasized that the team's top priority is to keep grant payments and grantee support moving as smoothly as possible and said she will continue to monitor progress closely.

From a financial oversight perspective, Cathy stated that the transition will also require updates to Mass Cultural Council's internal financial workflows and procedures. She shared that the agency plans to update its internal controls in the spring so they align with the new system and revised processes, and she noted that a revised Mass Cultural Council Internal Control Plan will be presented in a future Council meeting packet.

She added that the next large-scale statewide system conversion will occur in a few years, when the Commonwealth transitions its payroll and human resources systems to a product named Workday. She described this future change as another significant modernization for all agencies, but remarked that one system conversion is enough to manage at the moment.

Switching to the lease update, Cathy reported that Mass Cultural Council has executed a new lease with the building and is awaiting follow-up procedures from DCAMM. She stated that the lease terms have been fully negotiated and settled and can now be publicly shared. She also noted that Dave had been a great partner throughout the project and added that, when she returns to the table in four years to negotiate again, she feels she will be well trained for the process.

Turning to staffing, Cathy reported that the agency is in the final stages of the selection process for two Program Officer positions on Jen's team. She shared that one candidate has accepted a position and is scheduled to begin on April 13, 2026, while the second position remains in process.

Cathy paused to allow time for remarks or questions before transitioning to the travel discussion.

Cathy then informed the Council that, prior to the last Executive Committee meeting, the Chair had approved \$110 in out-of-state travel costs for the Manager of Advancement and Strategic Partnerships, Erik Holmgren. She explained that Erik had been invited to serve as a panelist at the NAASA convening on February 12, 2026, where he presented on the role of Opioid Relief Funds in Massachusetts.

Cathy then transitioned the discussion to Dave to begin review of the Executive Committee proposed revisions to the out-of-state travel policy.

Dave provided context that this discussion continued from the Council's October Council meeting conversation. He noted that staff had intentionally not drafted a full policy yet, so as not to get ahead of Council direction. He summarized the overall intent of the proposed approach. The goal is to avoid using Council or Committee meeting time to approve very small travel expenses, such as a trip costing around \$110. Instead, the idea would be to create a clearer approval structure in which the Council approves a travel budget for the staff, Executive Director approves staff travel up to a certain limit within that budget, while Executive Director travel above a certain limit would require third-party approval (such as the Executive Committee or Board). Thresholds would determine when a travel item would need to come back for formal approval.

Marc outlined the proposed parameters in more detail. The proposal would begin with Council approving a travel budget at the start of each fiscal year. If staff travel remains within that approved budget, no additional approvals would be needed. As a safeguard, any individual trip that exceeds a set threshold would return to the Council or Executive Committee for review. Executive Director travel would be subject to a lower threshold and third-party review. Dave emphasized that all standard travel policy requirements would still apply, including a clear public purpose and selecting the lowest-cost option.

Marc encouraged Council Members to share their thoughts and suggestions.

Marc then moved to the next item, the extension of the Strategic Plan. Dave explained that this idea had been discussed last fall when Michael Bobbitt was still in his role. Because the Agency is now searching for a new Executive Director, the proposal is to extend the current Strategic Plan, which would otherwise expire in June, is even more important. Instead of covering FY24 through FY26, it would be extended through FY28 without other changes. This would allow a new Executive Director time to learn the Agency before beginning a new strategic planning process. Dave noted that Michael Bobbitt had approved this concept before his departure, and Executive Committee members agreed that it would give a new leader the space needed to get established before undertaking a full strategic planning effort. There were no questions for Dave. The Chair asked for a motion and a second to extend the Agency's strategic plan. Cecil Barron Jensen moved to approve the extension; Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin, David Kong, and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To extend Mass Cultural Council's current FY24 - 26 Strategic Plan for two years through the end of FY 2028.

The Chair then asked Jen for her Programs update.

Jen described the spring as a very busy period and shared some high-level numbers. So far this fiscal year the Agency has received just under 20,000 applications through the Grants Management System, including Local Cultural Council and Tribal Cultural Council applications. That represents about a three percent increase over last year. Over a longer timeframe the growth has been more significant, reflecting the Agency's equity outreach efforts and expanded eligibility. Compared with FY21, the Agency has seen a 65 percent increase in applications in FY26. Charts illustrating these trends were included in the meeting materials. Jen emphasized that the work is possible because of the strong team managing the grants system and introduced colleagues Allie Rosenthal and Colin Baylor who coordinate all grants management system efforts. She continued and shared that the Council book materials include updates from all Programs teams. Charles Baldwin has been working with Open Door Arts on an online accessibility tool, Timothea Pham is working on the Cultural Districts Initiative with plans to open the program to new districts in mid to late March, and Jay Paget and Miranda Cook are continuing work on the Cultural Facilities Fund.

Dave then reviewed the conflict of interest list included in the meeting materials. No changes were reported by the Council.

Marc then invited Massachusetts Gaming Commission Chair Jordan Maynard to say a few words. Jordan thanked the Chair for the opportunity to attend. He noted that he has known both the Acting Executive Director and the Chair for quite some time and was pleased to see Ann and Bethann as well as others he remembered from his time with the Governor's office. He explained that when Massachusetts established its gaming regulatory framework, one goal was to capture revenue that had previously gone to offshore betting and illegal bookmaking and redirect those funds toward public purposes. The Gaming Commission takes its responsibility for those funds seriously, particularly in relation to responsible gaming and public investment. He said the Commission is proud to remit funds to the Mass Cultural Council and is interested in strengthening the relationship between the two organizations. In recent months he has visited several organizations that have received funding, including the Guthrie Center, the Hanover Theatre, and the Marilyn Rodman Performing Arts Center, and has been impressed by how the funds are being used. He said he is very pleased with the continued partnership. He also mentioned that he had unexpectedly run into Michael Bobbitt the previous weekend while having dinner in downtown Boston and echoed others' comments that Michael will be missed. Jordan concluded by saying he would be happy to answer questions and that he looks forward to continuing the strong partnership.

Dave also thanked Chairman Maynard and his staff, noting that they have been extremely helpful in administering the program and that the relationship between the agencies has been very positive. He also expressed interest in exploring additional arts and cultural collaborations.

Marc then returned the floor to Jen so she could share grant recommendations. Jen thanked the Programs Committee for its engagement and feedback,

saying she always enjoys those meetings and values hearing Committee Members' perspectives. She began with the Gaming Mitigation Fund recommendations, noting that the memo in the materials is short because the program is currently in the second year of a two-year commitment.

The discussion then moved to Grants for Creative Individuals. Jen introduced Dan Blask, Program Manager for Artists and Youth, who described the FY26 awards: 464 unrestricted grants to artists and creative practitioners. He noted that the memo in the meeting materials includes the key details and program facts. Dan and his colleague Summer Confuorto had prepared a short slide presentation to give the Council a sense of the range of artists supported by the program (copies of which are available upon request). Dan explained that they organized the presentation by discipline categories selected by applicants. Dan and Summer shared slides highlighting a sampling of artists and creative work supported by the program.

Marc commented that seeing the artwork is one of the best parts of being on the Council. He noted the extraordinary diversity of artists and disciplines represented and acknowledged the enormous effort involved in selecting grantees. Jo-Ann agreed and thanked the team for sharing the work. Dan expressed deep appreciation for the Council's support of individual artists. Dave added that the Council has clearly communicated how much they value seeing tangible evidence of the cultural sector's work, and he said the Agency will continue to incorporate artistic examples into future meetings. There were no further comments or questions for Jen. The Chair asked for a motion and a second to approve the recommended grants. Diane Asadorian Masters moved to approve the grant recommendations; Donna Haghghat seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin, David Kong, and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent it was unanimously

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

RESOLVED: To approve the Grants for Creative Individuals, as presented at the Meeting.

Marc concluded the meeting by thanking Massachusetts Gaming Commission Chair Jordan Maynard again and reminding everyone about the upcoming Creative Sector Day at the State House. He also thanked Emily Ruddock from MassCreative for attending the meeting, and said he looked forward to seeing many people at the State House soon. He adjourned the meeting at 11:46 a.m.



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Acting Executive Director's Report

May 2026

Activities Report

On May 11, Acting Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon shared the May Executive Department Update detailing recent activities. Please look for the next monthly update in early June.

Conferences & Engagements

As noted in the Out-of-State Travel Request Approval (Item 6a) of the materials for today's meeting, staff members Cathy Cheng-Anderson and Greg Torrales will be traveling to the Americans for the Arts (AFTA) Annual Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on June 1-4.

Governing Council Updates

Mass Cultural Council

As Council Members have been informed, since our last meeting on February 25, Council Member Ché Anderson has been appointed as Chair of Mass Cultural Council and Joyce Linehan has been appointed as a new Council Member. We sincerely thank former chair Marc Carroll for his many years of service as member, Vice Chair and Chair of the Council.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met on April 14 and approved the agenda for today's Council Meeting. The Committee is next scheduled to meet on June 17.

Programs Committee

The Programs Committee is next scheduled to meet on June 17, for a summary of the year's activities and a brief preview of things to come in the upcoming FY27 spending plan.

Advancement Committee

Due to the availability of the Co-Chair of the Committee, the Advancement Committee, which was scheduled to meet on May 8, will now meet on June 4. In advance of that meeting, we will have a brief update on staff's advancement activities today at the Council meeting.

MITx Arts & Entrepreneurship Course.

In response to a question received at the Executive Committee, we are happy to report the following figures regarding [the MITx Arts and Entrepreneurship course](#), which Mass Cultural Council helped inspire, invested in, and promoted, and which opened to students at the end of March. While data is still being gathered, we can preliminarily report that 1,447 students have signed up for the course, at least 13% of which have elected to pay for an optional certificate of completion (which is higher than their average for other online courses) and while the data is still general, it seems as if at least 80% of the students (probably more) were from the Commonwealth. We hope to have more specific statewide numbers in the future.

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](#).

Acting Executive Director Engagements

Recently Completed Engagements

- Meeting with Congressman Jake Auchincloss regarding Gaming Mitigation Program – April 1, Narrows Center, Fall River
- “Advancing Arts, Culture, and Democracy” presented by Philanthropy MA – April 8, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge
- “Art for the Common Good” the UMASS Fine Arts Center's statewide convening on Arts, Health, and Wellbeing – April 10, UMASS Fine Arts Center, Amherst
- “Songs & Stories: Legacy and Impact of Boston’s Pullman Porter Community” presented by Silkroad and the Museum of African American History (MAAH) – April 15, MAAH, Boston

- PEN/Hemingway Award Ceremony – April 26, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, Boston
- “Creative Capital: Investing in Community” presented by Creative Collective and the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) – April 27, PEM, Salem
- Opening Reception for “Quabbin - Yesterday and Today” exhibit at the MA State House hosted by Senator Jo Comerford, Senator Jake Oliveira, and State Representative Aaron Saunders featuring the photography of Ed Comeau – May 5, MA State House, Boston
- Visit to Nurtury Early Learning with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education & Care in honor of Teacher Appreciation Week – May 6, Nurtury Early Learning, Jamaica Plain
- Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM) Annual Meeting – May 7, Park Plaza Hotel Conference Center, Boston
- Framingham Cultural Council 2026 Awards Reception – May 7, Framingham Public Library
- Worcester County Grant Celebration hosted by Mass Cultural Council – May 8, Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg
- Community Access to the Arts (CATA) Annual Gala – May 9, Shakespeare & Co., Lenox
- AIM Commonwealth Conversation with Senate President Karen Spilka – May 12, New England Aquarium, Boston
- “Amplifying Creativity in Massachusetts” a Boston Philanthropic Advisors’ Roundtable – May 12, Boston Children’s Museum, Boston

Upcoming Engagements

- Theater in the Open’s Gatekeeper’s House Ribbon Cutting – May 14, Newburyport
- Berkshire County Grant Celebration – May 15, Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge
- Visit to Watertown hosted by State Representative Steven Owens – May 18, various locations in Watertown



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Equity Progress Report

May 2026

Equity Plan Implementation

Disability Advisory Committee

We held a [Disability Advisory Committee](#) meeting on March 11. At the meeting, the committee reviewed and discussed:

- Grantmaking data focused on applicants and grantees of the Grants for Creative Individuals program.
- Feedback from all individuals who use the Grants Management System.
- Outreach strategies, user experience, and other ways to ensure that people with disabilities have equitable access to programs.

A copy of the presentation can be provided upon request.

Native American and Indigenous People's Advisory Committee

We held a [Native American and Indigenous People's Advisory Committee](#) meeting on March 20. The meeting provided an opportunity for conversation about the Agency's programs and identification processes as it relates to Native and Indigenous individuals and communities. We asked the committee members to share examples of how they, their tribe, and/or their organizations approach identification in their work or events. We also sought thoughts, feedback, or best practice recommendations about our current identification processes.

- As envisioned by the [Native American and Indigenous People's Equity Plan](#), Mass Cultural Council is working to secure a technical

amendment to the Cultural Facilities Fund statute that clarifies that all primarily cultural facilities in Massachusetts that are nonprofit, municipally owned, and tribally owned are eligible to apply for assistance to the Fund. This legislation, [S. 2169](#), is currently pending before the Senate Committee on Ways & Means. However, in mid-April, the Governor granted our request to include this proposed change in her economic development bond bill, known as the [Mass Wins Act](#). The text filed by the Administration omits any reference to tribally owned facilities, but upon follow up Mass Cultural Council was advised this was done in error. The Administration said it will reach out to the Legislature to explain the mistake and ask for a correction; Mass Cultural Council will do the same in any testimony filed on the bond bill. A hearing is scheduled for May 19.

Sector Education, Services & Achievement

Access Office Hours: peer learning session providing organizational counsel, effective practice, and shared resources for grantees and applicants:

- Mar 24: [Small Shops](#)
- Apr 28: [Large Institutions](#)
- May 13: [Access Plan Q&A with Open Door Arts](#)
- May 19: [Budgets & Funding](#)
- June 10: [Access Plan Q&A with Open Door Arts](#)

Programs

This year, the Tribal Cultural Council (TCC) Program has four TCCs accepting applications:

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

The TCCs completed their cycles, investing \$39,158 in 30 projects and programs in their communities. All 4 TCCs are planning on doing Council Programs as well, meaning that an additional \$27,719 will benefit their communities.

Internal

- Mass Cultural Council is partnering with Open Door Arts on the [Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub](#) to strengthen accessibility across the sector. As part of this work and to meet expectations of the National Endowment for the Arts and the d/Deaf and Disability and Deaf Equity Plan, we have formed an internal working group to complete the agency's Arts and Culture Self-Assessment Survey. The 300+ question assessment reviews our approach, spaces, technology, communications, and programs, then produces scored reports highlighting strengths and areas that need improvement. The assessment will also synthesize results into key themes and recommendations regarding our internal and external accessibility priorities.
- Public Affairs drafted an ADA Action Plan to demonstrate steps we've taken and steps still to be taken around making our digital spaces meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards. The federal deadline has been moved from April 24, 2026, to April 26, 2027, so we're using that Action Plan as the foundation for a cross-department work plan to continue to meet those standards.
- New Word templates have been developed and shared with staff members to help ensure that new external documents are accessible for those who use screen readers and other technologies.



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Advancement Report

May 2026

Advancing the Cultural Sector in Massachusetts

One of the key tools Mass Cultural Council has used over the years to support the cultural community in Massachusetts has been [Grantmaking](#). While this has been, and will always constitute, a core part of Mass Cultural Council's mission, given the size of the state's cultural sector and the realization that even with the relatively robust funding we receive from the state and other sources, we will never be able to meet all of the needs of the sector through funding.

Through our advancement efforts, our goals are to:

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

Advancement work is focused on building a statewide ecosystem of partners that advance our sector as a key pillar of economic and workforce development, housing, community development, and other areas. We want to create an arts and culture ecosystem where artists and organizations benefit from all parts of the Commonwealth. In addition to bringing significant new funding to our sector over the last 15 months, our work is laying the foundation for large scale, systemic changes for our sector. A few highlights from the most recent quarter include:

Economic and Workforce Development

STEAM Subcommittee

- The STEM Advisory Committee is co-chaired by the Lt. Governor and Secretary of Education and is composed of four cabinet secretaries, along with major STEM industry leaders. Mass Cultural Council is launching the first-ever STEAM subcommittee to formally make recommendations for the inclusion of creativity in the arts as an essential and driving force to economic growth.

Higher Education

- On April 17, Mass Cultural Council convened leaders of public and private higher education arts institutions at Worcester State University to brainstorm, together, how we might systematize connections between higher education and industry. This is something that the STEM community has done extraordinarily well. Not only do these connections help to provide sustainable careers for thousands of graduates each year, they will also help keep graduates in the Commonwealth.

Tufts' Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning (UEP) Field Project

- Students from Tufts' UEP program will be completing a report to identify recommendations and opportunities for the Creative Workforce Pipeline for MA.

MassChallenge

- MassChallenge, a non-profit business incubator, will also be completing a study in the coming months, identifying opportunities for our sector to more closely align with industry.

The Commonwealth Summit

- From April 9-11, we were invited to attend The Commonwealth Summit, a three-day retreat of leaders from the public and private sectors to tackle the biggest challenges facing Massachusetts. This year's retreat focused on Economic Competitiveness and Housing and was perhaps the most valuable three days of networking and relationship-building we have had all year.
- We presented on a panel at the Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism, introducing the Mass Lodging and Mass Restaurant campaign and providing 'how-to' insight and resources.

Education

Early Education and Care

- With the support of Mass Cultural Council, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED), and the Executive Office of Education (EOE), all worked together to curate a list of discounts for early childhood educators to attend cultural organizations. This was unveiled during Teacher Appreciation Week in early May.
- We will be planning a tour of site visits this summer with our Acting Executive Director, Commissioner Kershaw, Commissioner Zrike, Secretary Paley, and others.

Health Care

Arts Prescription

- The Communities team reached out to every municipal Opioid Relief contact in the Commonwealth that had a minimum of \$75,000 in funding available. SocialRx (formerly Art Pharmacy) is currently in conversations with at least 18 municipalities to utilize this funding.
- SocialRx has expanded to include arts prescriptions at five different clinics at Mass General Brigham and is in conversation with five universities and two other health insurance companies around expansion.
- On April 10, we facilitated a panel with the Commissioner of Public Health, Dr. Robbie Goldstein, and the Director of Health Policy and Strategic Initiatives at a statewide conference focused on arts and health at UMass Amherst.

Climate

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)

- Mass Cultural Council co-hosted an interactive webinar with the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs in March to integrate our sector into their 2050 Environmental planning process.

Housing

MassHousing

- We have a cross-team group of program staff supporting the MassHousing Conference on June 16, 2026, that will be focused on the role the arts can play in public housing.
- Both the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and MassHousing are providing grant funding for artists and arts organizations on Creative Placemaking projects, bringing new funding to our field.

Community Development

Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC)

- We have partnered with MACDC to work with cultural districts and creative entities through annual Community Investment Tax Credit (CITC) program funding.
- We've been invited to present at the upcoming annual summit, as we did last year, and to offer learning opportunities through their Mel King Institute.
- We have joined the review Committee for MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Districts and this year's Rural Development Fund, informed guidelines for the Mass Downtown Initiative (MDI) Capital Grant program, and are working to make Small Business Technical Assistance Grants accessible to our sector through MACDC and MassDevelopment.
- Along with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, we will be presenting on advancement at the MassCreative Creative Sector Summit in New Bedford, offering municipal and regional opportunities for non-arts funding and how to access them.

Our new strategic plan prioritized advancement as an institutional pillar of the Agency, and it has created significant momentum and opportunities across sectors. As we look toward our FY27 plan, we will continue on the path of building new partners and pointing this work toward structural change for our sector that enhances our ability to support the amazing arts and culture field of the Commonwealth.



Power of culture

Public Affairs Report

May 2026

Budget/Legislative/Advocacy Update

- The State House of Representatives held its FY27 state budget debate during the week of April 27. Mass Cultural Council did not need to seek an amendment to increase its line-item appropriation as the [House Committee on Ways & Means](#) granted our request and retained the Governor's \$27.35M for our operating budget; a 5% increase from the current fiscal year. Thousands of amendments were filed by the Representatives, including 20 that proposed adding legislative earmarks to the Agency's line-item for local cultural priorities. During the debate, 9 of those amendments were adopted, adding a total of \$375,000 to the Agency's account for those 9 legislative priorities.
- Mass Cultural Council worked with Rep. Mindy Domb and Rep. Sean Garballey to file an amendment (#543) attempting to add the text of the STEM to STEAM bill to the House budget as an outside section, after our advocacy efforts, 38 House Members signed on as co-sponsors but it was not adopted. Mass Cultural Council also worked with Rep. Garballey to file an amendment earmarking \$25,000 for a stipend for the Official Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth. This amendment, #710, had the support of 26 co-sponsors, but was also not adopted.
- The FY27 budget then moved to the Senate whose Committee on Ways & Means released its budget proposal on May 5. It includes both the \$27.35 million operating budget for Mass Cultural Council

(same as the Governor and the final House budget) and an authorization for a \$25k stipend for the Massachusetts Poet Laureate.

- The Governor filed her economic development bond bill in mid-April. Dubbed the "**Mass Wins Act**", this bond contains some policy and \$50M in new capital spending authorizations that benefit the cultural sector, including most of the language of our Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) technical amendment legislation (we are working with the House and Senate on the final drafting of this section); a new capital grant program for the creative economy; and another new grant program that supports downtown vitality, which will benefit our state designated cultural districts.
- FY27 begins on July 1, and the formal legislative session ends on July 31, meaning many of our pending budget and policy proposals may be finalized by the August Council meeting.

Events/Communications/Digital Communications Update

Events

Since the February Council meeting, we've continued to hold events and regional grant celebration events throughout the state, with some still to come:

- On **March 9**, we were at the Abbot Public Library in Marblehead to celebrate a \$4.6 million investment into Northeastern Massachusetts. Thank you to Simone Early for providing remarks on behalf of the Council.
- On **March 23**, we were at El Mercado Local in Holyoke to celebrate a \$1.6 million investment into Hampden County. Thank you to Donna Haghghat for attending and Chair Anderson and Vice-Chair Davis for providing remarks.
- On **March 30**, we were at the New Bedford Whaling Museum to celebrate a \$1.4 million investment in Bristol County. Thank you to Ashley Occhino, Cecil Barron Jensen, and Vinny deMacedo for providing remarks on behalf of the Council.
- On **April 7**, we were at the Boston Children's Museum to celebrate our Card to Culture program with more than 600 participating organizations delivering over 3 million admissions. Thank you to Chair

Anderson and Ellice Patterson for attending, and Joyce Linehan for providing remarks.

- On **May 8**, we will be at the Fitchburg Art Museum to celebrate our investments in Worcester County.
- On **May 15**, we will be at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge to celebrate our investments in Berkshire County. Thank you to Vice-Chair Davis, Tom Bernard, Rhonda Anderson, and Donna Haghighat for planning to attend.
- On **June 15**, we will be holding celebrations on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard at the invitation of Cecil Barron Jensen and Emily Bramhall. Thank you to Julie Wake for planning to join us for these events, as well.
- On **June 25**, we will be holding one final virtual fiscal year end celebration to celebrate all our FY26 accomplishments. All FY26 grantees, Council Members, and Agency Staff will be invited to attend. Please hold the date.

As always, Council Members are welcome and encouraged to join us for any events in your area, as your schedule permits. Please be in touch with Bethann for more details about upcoming events and to let us know if you plan to attend!

Media/Community Relations

Mass Cultural Council in the news:

- [Competitiveness fears weave through budget hearings](#)
(CommonWealth Beacon, March 10, 2026)

Gaming Mitigation Fund

- [Lynn Auditorium receives \\$200,000 from state Gaming Mitigation Fund](#)
(ItemLive, March 18, 2026)
- [Fall River's Narrows Center, New Bedford's Zeiterion get state grants](#)
(The Herald News, March 10, 2026)
- [Hanover Theatre among state venues getting gaming mitigation grants](#) (Worcester Telegram & Gazette, March 9, 2026)
- [Franklin School for the Performing Arts Among Beneficiaries of Gaming Mitigation](#) (Franklin Observer, March 8, 2026)

- [Berkshire performing arts organizations receive state grants](#) (The Berkshire Edge, March 7, 2026)

Grants for Creative Individuals

- [Area Artists Share in Mass Cultural Council Creative Individuals Grants](#) (WHAU, March 1, 2026)
- [Berkshire County artists receive grants from Mass Cultural Council](#) (The Berkshire Edge, February 27, 2026)

Poetry Out Loud

- [Wellesley boarding school student wins state poetry contest](#) (MetroWest Daily News, March 16, 2026)
- [FHS Student Nabs Third Place in Statewide Poetry Contest](#) (Franklin Observer, March 13, 2026)

YouthReach

- [Beverly Awarded \\$53K in YouthReach Grants](#) (Patch, February 19, 2026)

Cultural Districts

- [Berkshire Cultural Districts Awarded Grants](#) (iBerkshires, February 19, 2026)
- [Town's cultural district awarded \\$15,000 in grants](#) (Your Arlington, February 10, 2026)
- [\\$15,000 awarded to Winchester Cultural District, designated engine of local creativity and economic growth](#) (Daily Times Chronicle, February 9, 2026)

As a reminder, we regularly issue press releases and media advisories to outlets statewide throughout the year announcing grant decisions, new programming, and other notable items. We share these with Council Members when they're released, they also remain available to re-read in the [Press Room](#) at any time.

Web

Updated the web site in support of FY26 activities, including:

- FY26 Program guidelines (Creative Experiences and Cultural District Designation/Redesignation).
- FY26 Funding lists (Creative Individuals, Local Cultural Council Program, Gaming Mitigation, Tribal Cultural Council Program).
- Launched a [Partner with Local Artists](#) toolkit (and [social media promo kit](#)) in support of our campaign with the Mass Restaurant and Mass Lodging Associations (and our Creative Entrepreneurship series).

Web developers have audited the site's custom WordPress theme and will continue to implement improvements through FY26. Staff has begun to do a page-by-page audit in preparation for the April 26, 2027 federal compliance deadline.

Blog

Published 24 blog posts since the February Council update - in partnership with Program staff - to amplify and document the Agency's work.

Of note:

- Continued making the case for arts/cultural participation as a benefit to public health:
 - [When Cost is No Longer a Barrier](#) (← Don't miss this piece)
 - [Worth Standing Up For – Creative Youth Development, SDoH & Communities](#)
 - [Arts and Culture Improve Health and Equity](#)
- Continued our series on Creative Entrepreneurship:
 - [New Campaign Encourages Hospitality Industry to Partner with Local Artists](#)
 - [Arts & Business Insights: Likemind Design](#)
 - [New MITx Arts Entrepreneurship Course Starts March 25](#)

- Grant award announcements for [Creative Individuals](#), [Local Cultural Council Program](#), [Gaming Mitigation](#), [Tribal Cultural Council Program](#), and [America250](#).
- Featured [MOTT's blog series on Cultural Districts](#) by region.

Video

Kicked off the process to develop a motion graphic promoting arts/cultural participation as a necessary ingredient for public health. This piece will be a part of an ongoing campaign to celebrate the Power of Culture generally and to amplify the Agency's efforts in supporting cultural participation across program areas.

Campaigns & Social Media

- Continued Employee Spotlight social media campaign to welcome Kortney and Lauren to the Programs Team.
- Continued campaign celebrating Card to Culture participating organizations.
- Started campaign to encourage the hospitality industry to partner with local artists: [on the blog](#) and social media [\(example\)](#).

Media Partnerships

The FY26 media partnership promoting our grant opportunities and events with El Planeta Media continued. This partnership includes articles, social media graphics & videos, and newsletter mentions. A few examples:

- [Mass Cultural Council anuncia nueva convocatoria para que proyectos creativos locales accedan a financiamiento](#)
- [Instagram post](#)
- [Card to Culture Celebration Reel](#)

In addition, we've developed partnerships with two new outlets: [Somos Berkshires](#) and [Rádio Insuperável](#). A couple examples:

- [Somos Berkshires' Instagram Reel](#)
- [Rádio Insuperável web article: Programa disponibiliza até US\\$ 5 mil para projetos culturais em Massachusetts](#)



Power of culture

Business Operations Report

May 2026

As fiscal year 2026 draws to a close, the latest spending activity shows that contracting, grant payments, and project launches remain on target and consistent with our overall fiscal plan. Spending trends continue to align with projections, and we expect expenditures to increase steadily through the end of the year as projects advance and planned payments are completed. Additionally, at this time of year, the team manages year-end close and fiscal year open activities.

Mosaic

Mass Cultural Council successfully transitioned to its new financial application, Mosaic, which launched on Monday, February 23. Since go-live, the team has been taking training classes to deepen their system knowledge and has rerouted workflows to match the system's requirements. This was a major operational milestone, and congratulations are well deserved for the team's management of the many moving parts required to execute such a significant system change successfully.

National Endowment for the Arts Spending

As you know, Mass Cultural Council was awarded \$1,310,938 from the National Endowment for the Arts. As of May 1, 2026, we successfully closed out the federal grant and received \$1,308,438, the total award amount. The remaining \$2,500 is anticipated to go unspent due to grant eligibility limitations. Overall, the grant has been managed in accordance with program requirements and reconciled through the closeout process.

FY26 Update on Grant Payments

Year-to-date as of April 30, 2026, we have paid 2,126 approved grantees, representing 97.9% of those eligible for payment. Many thanks to the Business Operations team for keeping our contracts and payments moving so efficiently and managing the needs of our grantees.

New Staff

We are pleased to welcome two new Program Officers to Mass Cultural Council. Kourtney Adams has joined the team as Program Officer for Artists and Youth, and Lauren Bjella has joined as Program Officer for Communities. We are excited to have them onboard and look forward to the experience and perspective they will bring to this work.

FY26 Spending Update

Council-approved budget Allocation (Core)

This summary presents a comparison between the Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of April 30, 2026, encompassing our core appropriation.

- **Total Council Approved Budget Allocations (Core):** 26,975,152
- Total Expenses as of 4/30/26(Core): 23,765,021 or 88%

Expense Category	State Funding - Approved Allocations	Expenses 4/30/26	Percentage of Funds Expended	Spending Projections 4/30/26
AA: Salary	4,323,242	3,326,111	77%	4,249,421
BB: Employee Reimbursement	96,739	42,316	44%	60,555
CC: Contracted Staff	0	0	0%	0
DD: Payroll Tax and Fringe	95,544	68,403	72%	93,912
EE: Administrative Expenses	153,383	129,020	84%	168,120
GG: Rent and Electricity	333,565	287,582	86%	331,565
HH: Consulting Services	251,750	99,209	39%	165,094
JJ: Programmatic Services	197,096	180,852	92%	208,195
KK: Non-IT Equipment	5,000	0	0%	0
LL: Leases	13,299	7,713	58%	12,799
PP: Grant Programs	20,225,573	18,460,660	91%	20,392,216
PP: Legislative Earmarks	930,000	930,000	100%	930,000
UU: Information Technology	349,961	233,155	67%	363,275
Totals	26,975,152	23,765,021	88%	26,975,152

All Funding Sources

This summary presents a comparison between Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of April 30, 2026, encompassing both core appropriation and additional funding sources.

- **Council-Approved Budget Allocations (All Sources):** \$33,660,992
- Council-Approved Budget Allocations + \$162K increase in gaming revenue: \$33,822,917.
- Total Expenses as of 4/30/26 (All Sources): \$30,045,689 or 89%

Expense Category	All Sources + Gaming Increase	Expenses 4/30/26	Percentage of Funds Expended	Spending Projections 4/30/26
AA: Salary	4,728,656	3,649,378	77%	4,650,917
BB: Employee Reimbursement	101,342	42,316	42%	63,672
CC: Contracted Staff	0	0	0%	0
DD: Payroll Tax and Fringe	248,828	147,756	59%	245,718
EE: Administrative Expenses	200,334	160,502	80%	214,980
GG: Rent and Electricity	408,565	325,082	80%	406,565
HH: Consulting Services	261,750	103,209	39%	175,094
JJ: Programmatic Services	245,096	180,852	74%	259,195
KK: Non-IT Equipment	5,000	0	0%	0
LL: Leases	13,299	7,713	58%	12,799
PP: Grant Programs	26,323,985	24,264,080	92%	26,488,128
PP: Legislative Earmarks	930,000	930,000	100%	930,000
UU: Information Technology	356,064	234,801	66%	369,377
* Totals	33,822,917	30,045,689	89%	33,816,445

* Spending Projections: The minor variance between the all-sources budget and projected expenses is primarily attributable to the anticipated unspent NEA grant balance and minor miscellaneous expense adjustments.



Power of culture

Out-of-State Travel Approvals

(Agenda Item 6a)

To: Mass Cultural Council
From: David Slatery, Acting Executive Director
Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
Date: May 19, 2026
Re: **Out-of-State Travel Approvals**

Under the current Out-of-State Travel Policy, any staff travel outside Massachusetts must receive prior approval from the Executive Committee. If meeting timing makes Executive Committee approval impracticable, the request may be approved by the Chair and subsequently reported to the Executive Committee and full Council.

Staff became aware of this conference after the April 14 Executive Committee meeting. Because the travel is scheduled for the week of June 1, there was not an opportunity to bring the request before the Executive Committee in advance. Consistent with the policy, staff sought and received Chair approval and is reporting the travel to the Executive Committee and full Council at the May 19 meeting.

The travel request outlined below totals \$2,055. Attendance by Greg Torrales, Program Officer, and Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer, provides clear public benefit, directly supports their core job responsibilities, aligns with the Council's mission, Strategic Plan, and Equity Plan, and represents a cost-effective use of resources. All required Travel Authorization Forms and Procurement Request Forms are on file.

AFTACON 2026 Albuquerque, New Mexico June 1-5, 2026

This conference hosted by the Americans for the Arts is directly relevant to the Council's work and provides timely professional development on

issues central to the agency's mission. Travel is justified because it supports staff leadership, policy, advocacy, and sector-support responsibilities, while bringing back national strategies and peer-tested approaches that can inform the Council's work.



Power of culture

Out of State Travel Policy

(Agenda Item 6b)

To: Mass Cultural Council
From: David Slatery, Acting Executive Director
Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
Date: May 19, 2026
Re: Out of State Travel Policy Revisions

At the Executive Committee meeting on April 14, 2026, revisions to the Council's out-of-state travel policy that had been under consideration since the fall were discussed. The basic elements of the new policy include:

- The full Council will approve a specific travel budget as part of the annual spending plan.
- Any staff travel would generally be approved by the Executive Director within that budget; and
- Only travel expenses above certain per-trip dollar thresholds would need to return to the Executive Committee or Council for specific approval. In addition, the Executive Director's travel above a lower threshold should require separate approval, so that the Executive Director would not be approving their own travel expenses beyond a certain amount.

The Committee supported moving away from the review of routine, lower-cost staff travel while preserving appropriate oversight for higher-cost travel and Executive Director-related travel. At the direction of the Chair, staff is bringing the proposed travel policy to the full Council for consideration and vote.

This memo presents the updated policy framework as discussed and includes recommended threshold amounts for Council review. Staff will update the policy to reflect the threshold amounts agreed upon during the May 19 Council Meeting discussion. In the draft policy below, items 2-5 have been updated to reflect the discussions thus far and include threshold amounts for the Council to consider.

Out-of-State Travel Policy – Revisions

This policy represents 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. An out-of-state travel budget will be included as part of the agency's overall spending plan and presented to the Executive Committee and Council for one-time approval each year as part of its regular budget cycle. All travel shall align with the Council's mission, Strategic Plan, and Equity Plan, and represent a cost-effective use of resources. Travel will be reported regularly to the Council.
3. Out-of-state travel by employees shall be approved administratively by the Executive Director, provided the out-of-state travel is within the agency's approved annual out-of-state travel budget and otherwise complies with this policy. Individual employee trips do not require pre-approval by the Executive Committee unless they exceed a spending threshold of \$2500 per trip established by the Council.
4. Out-of-state travel by the Executive Director shall be approved in advance by the Executive Committee when it exceeds the applicable threshold of \$1000 per trip established by the Council.
5. All out-of-state travel, whether approved administratively or by the Executive Committee, shall be reported quarterly to the Council.
6. The agency is responsible for maintaining documents, including the Travel Authorization Form, any required State Ethics disclosure forms, and the Procurement Request Form. No expenses or reimbursements detailed in this form shall be approved by staff 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 requested but will not be routinely submitted for review or approval.
7. 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.

8. 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:
 - o Economy/coach airfare and ground transportation (train, bus, taxi, ridesharing services) including reasonable tips not more than 20% of the fare.
 - o Economical hotel and lodging considering proximity to the business destination and personal safety.
 - o Conference fees
 - o Private auto-mileage following federal guidelines set forth by the [General Services Administration \(GSA\)](#)
 - o Parking and tolls
 - o Car rental arrangements
 - o Purchase of gas for car rental
 - o Meal reimbursement following federal guidelines set forth by the [General Services Administration \(GSA\)](#).

Breakfast: \$16.00 (applicable period 3:01 to 9:00AM)

Lunch: \$19.00 (applicable period 9:01AM to 3:00PM)

Dinner: \$28.00 (applicable period 3:01 to 9:00PM)

9. 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.
10. 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.



Power of culture

Program Operations Report

May 2026

Grants Overview

Jen Lawless, Colin Baylor, Allie Rosenthal

In June, we will provide the Programs Committee with a detailed report of our FY26 grantmaking.

Here, we wanted to provide an update about where we are right now:

- In FY26, we received a total of 19,928 applications through our system (includes applications to LCCs and TCCs).
- To date, we have made 2,215 grants totaling \$27,359,300.
- LCCs/TCCs combined have made 7,618 grants totaling \$7,564,766.
- We will announce Cultural Facilities Funds grants later this month, which is the final program to make awards this fiscal year.

We collected feedback from FY26 applicants over the course of FY26 on our applications, website, and staff support.

Here is a summary of the feedback from roughly **7,000 responses**:

- 60% of applicants completed their application in 2 hours or less.
- 4% of applicants found the application very or somewhat complicated/unclear.
- 2% of applicants found the website very or somewhat unclear/unhelpful.

- Of those that reached out to staff for help, 1% found staff very/somewhat unhelpful.

Access & Inclusion

Charles Baldwin

Advancement: Cross-Sector Partnerships

- MA Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Town Hall listening session, Lowell, March 27
- Art for the Common Good, Arts and Health convening, Amherst, April 10
- Degrees of Change, Strengthening the Creative Workforce Pipeline, Worcester State University, April 17
- Mass Office of Travel and Tourism, Revolutionary Valley Regional Tourism Council's Annual Conference, Inclusivity and Accessibility panel, April 30
- MassHousing, Housing Stability Conference: Building Community Through Arts and Culture. Tuesday June 16

Service to the Sector

- Envisioning Access. Technology showcase with user/expert Justin Lowery, Allston, March 13
- ABLE Assembly, Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education, Boston, April 11-12
- NASAA Steering Committee- SAA/RAO ADA/504 Coordinators peer sessions
- In development: LEAD Conference Aug 10-15, Philadelphia

Open Door Arts Partnership

Meeting monthly on the development of the learning modules and certification process in the Arts Access Hub, launching August 2026.

UP Initiative

Recipients of the 2026 UP Innovation Fund will be required to submit an Access/Transition Plan with their Annual Report.

Cross Program Support

Responding to applicants for Creative Experience grants, providing individual and organizational counsel, and attending Mass Cultural Council grant celebrations

Artists & Youth

Dan Blask, Kortney Adams, Kelly Bennett, Amy Chu, Summer Confuorto, Kätthe Swaback

Staffing

In April, the Artists & Youth team was pleased to welcome Kortney Adams as Program Officer, Artists & Youth. Before joining the Agency, she was Director of Education and Community Initiatives at Central Square Theater in Cambridge. She will support our grants and initiatives for artists and youth, including the YouthReach grant (see update below).

Creative Experiences

The FY27 [Creative Experiences](#) program accepted applications from March 3, 2026, with a deadline of April 30, 2026, 11:59pm (ET). The program in its current incarnation debuted in March 2025, and this will mark the program's second year. It combines the prior Festivals & Projects and Creative Projects for Schools/STARs programs. Applications were open to all types of organizations creating, presenting, and/or offering experiences incorporating the arts, humanities, and sciences for people in Massachusetts. Grant recommendations (in the amounts of \$2,500 and \$5,000) will go to the August Programs Committee and Council Meetings for approval.

YouthReach

The review process is underway for the FY27 [YouthReach](#) grant to support innovative, ongoing Creative Youth Development programs. For more than thirty years, YouthReach has nurtured the creativity and potential of young people through grants to programs that center youth leadership, racial equity, and social change.

This year's program had an application deadline of April 2, 2026, at 11:59pm (ET). Staff is working with reviewers from the CYD field to score applications based on the program's criteria. Grant recommendations

(expected award range is \$20,000-\$27,000) will go to the August Programs Committee and Council Meetings for approval.

Grants for Creative Individuals

FY26 awards for the Grants for Creative Individuals program were approved at the February Programs Committee and Council meetings. Notifications to all applicants, including 464 grantees and 2,766 declined applicants, were sent in late February. Since then, the fiscal staff has processed grant payments, most of which are now completed. This is the first batch of grant awards processed using a new state system called Mosaic (replacing the former state payment system, MMARS).

Advancement

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

Partnerships include:

- Governor's Office to exhibit MA artists in the Governor's reception at the State House, including Massachusetts250, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Black History Month exhibitions.
- Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to support their Creative Placemaking Award, capital grants to create art installations and more at 5 to 8 Local Housing Authorities. We offered feedback on the guidelines and presented two webinars to the Local Housing Authorities on working with artists on public projects.
- Massachusetts Restaurant Association and Massachusetts Lodging Association to increase opportunities for local artists, including an online toolbox for connecting hospitality industry and artists/arts orgs.
- MITX for their online Creative Entrepreneurship course. We offered pre-launch feedback and widely promoted the opportunity to constituents.

Supporting Native American and Indigenous Communities

Summer Confuorto from the Artists & Youth team supports the [Native American & Indigenous People's Advisory Committee](#) in their work guiding the implementation of the Agency's [Native American and Indigenous People's Equity Plan](#), helping to create and evaluate systems and services, assessing programs, and establishing meaningful annual benchmarks that advance our equity goals. This year's work has included an in-person convening at the Herring Pond Wampanoag

Meeting House in November, followed by virtual meetings in January and March, with another session planned for May. We will continue and deepen this work in FY27.

In addition, Summer continues her efforts in outreach and relationship-building within Native communities. She's attended events such as the Native Artisan Market & Festival in Aquinnah and the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB) Annual Arts and Crafts Fair to connect with Native artists, share information about Agency programs, and encourage participation. She's also engaged in learning opportunities, including the Harvard University Native American Program symposium and the Massachusetts Tribal Health Summit, to better understand best practices for building respectful, reciprocal partnerships between Native communities and non-Native institutions.

Poetry Out Loud

In late April, the Poetry Out Loud Massachusetts state champion, Nia Cao (a Junior from Dana Hall School in Needham), traveled to Washington, D.C. for the national finals. While she did not advance to the final rounds, she made it to the top 8 in our region. Additionally, Nia and her family got to meet with MA Congressman Auchincloss while in D.C.

Poetry Out Loud is a poetry recitation program for high school performers overseen by the National Endowment for the Arts. Mass Cultural Council contracts with The Huntington to implement and administer all aspects of the Massachusetts program. The \$25,000 for the contract is designated for the program by the NEA in their grant to us. Massachusetts has been one of the five largest programs in the country for the last twelve years and the largest in New England. State finals were held at the Old South Meeting House on Sunday, March 8, 2026.

Communities

Lisa Simmons, Lauren Bjella, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Timothea Pham, Sommers Smith, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong

The Communities Initiative Program of the Mass Cultural Council consists of the Local Cultural Council Program, the Cultural District Initiative, the BIPOC-Centered Organization Self-Identification process, and the Creative Experiences grant program, which we share with two other programs.

The Communities Initiative team backfilled a vacant position and hired a new team member. The team is now complete with 6 program officers and one manager who are responsible for providing support, advice, and training to the 329 cultural councils in the Commonwealth, as well as the 4 Tribal Cultural Councils. Team members (except for the Program Manager) work with between 25 - 90 LCCs. Within the team, one program officer is also a member of the Creative Experiences team, and one is leading the BIPOC Centered Organization Self-Identification process in addition to supporting LCCs. The Program Manager works with the Tribal Cultural Councils, the Boston Cultural Council, and the Islands. The Cultural Districts Program Officer works within the Communities team and is responsible for the Cultural Districts program only.

Since the beginning of the FY26 fiscal year, the Communities Team has successfully completed the LCC grant cycle (September 1-January 16, 2026), the Cultural Districts Grant Program (\$15,000 to 58 Cultural Districts), and the Creative Experiences grant cycle.

Local Cultural Council (LCC) Program

The LCC program successfully completed the FY26 grant cycle. Due to outreach from both the Councils and the Mass Cultural Council, the LCC program received a record number of applications 13,078 applications this year. Of those applications, the LCCs/TCCs approved 7,618 grants totaling \$ 7,564,766. These grants support community-based projects in the arts, humanities, and sciences—including murals, lectures, festivals, and performances. Mass Cultural Council allocated \$5,700,000 to LCCs and \$69,300 to TCCs in FY26, with many LCCs further strengthening their grant pools by contributing additional locally and municipally raised funds from FY26. We are currently looking at the guidelines for FY27 and are considering small edits and tweaks for the following year.

Cultural Districts

In August, the Council approved funds for the 58 current Cultural Districts. The awards were successfully distributed to the districts. The FY26 Cultural District Guidelines have been launched for current districts to review and start the process of recertification. Current districts have until March 2028 to submit their application for recertification.

The FY27 Cultural District Guidelines for new cultural districts will be launched in July. The new guidelines for the Cultural District program will strengthen the partnership between the district and the municipality,

requiring municipalities to make a tangible investment in their district, pass a more specific resolution in support of the district, require Districts to have paid district staff, and provide a detailed GIS map of their district or the data necessary to create a map. In addition, districts will create a Local Partnership Agreement and include the roles and responsibilities of all the district partnership members. The districts must develop a work plan with specific goals that are aligned with the program's statutory goals.

We want all communities to continue to be successful in infusing arts and culture into their community and economic development efforts and look forward to working with the current and potential districts.

Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF)

Jay Paget, Miranda Cook

In early March, the Mass Cultural Council convened four Capital Grant review panels and one Feasibility Grant review panel. Eleven panelists were selected who had expertise in a variety of fields, including but not limited to: non-profit business planning, real estate development, capital fundraising, community engagement and development, finance, architecture, and historic preservation. Three Mass Cultural staff also read and scored just the Feasibility applications. Those staff were Jay Paget, Miranda Cook, and Sara Glidden, Program Manager for Operating Grants for Organizations.

To give the panelists enough time to review the applications, the materials were sent to the panelists four weeks in advance of the meetings.

The Capital Grant panels were assigned applications according to organizational budget size to give the fairest review possible. The groupings were as follows:

- Group 1: \$2K - \$72K
- Group 2: \$94K – \$257K
- Group 3: \$258K-\$594K
- Group 4: \$643K - \$1.1M
- Group 5: \$1.1M - \$3.1M
- Group 6: \$3.1M - \$48M

Each panelist was carefully instructed to assess the materials in accordance with the approved and published CFF guidelines and review criteria. In addition, the panelists were briefed on unintended bias and how to recognize bias, to equitably improve the review process.

The next step in the process is to bring the panel recommendations to the CFF Advisory Committee for discussion and approval. After the Advisory Committee, the final step is a vote by the MassDevelopment Board, scheduled for mid-May.

Following the MassDevelopment Board meeting in mid-May, the Mass Cultural Council and MassDevelopment will issue grant notifications, press releases, and legislative notifications.

Organizations

Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee

Creative Experiences

Staff supported the fiscal team contacting grantees, and payments for the FY26 cycle of Creative Experiences are nearly complete. Final reports are available now and are due mid-July. Much of the time over the last few months was spent on opening and supporting applicants through the application process for our FY27 cycle of Creative Experiences. The application deadline was April 30, 2025, with 1,747 applications submitted by the deadline. Staff will review these applications for eligibility and prioritization over the next few months.

Gaming Mitigation Fund

All contracts have been fully executed for the FY26 Gaming Mitigation Fund, and grantees are working to complete Final Reports, which are due June 18, 2026. Planning for the FY27 Gaming Mitigation Fund will begin shortly.

Card to Culture

Program Officer Lindiana Flores worked with the Public Affairs team to celebrate the milestone accomplishment with a special event at the Boston Children's Museum. Over 600 organizations have signed up to participate in the Card to Culture program. She also wrote a powerful blog post about the program "[When Cost is No Longer a Barrier](#)".

Operating Grants for Organizations

Sara has been working with a consultant on a report on the financial health of Mass Cultural Council's operating support recipients, which will be published shortly. The report reflects the trends in organization financial performance.

Advancement

- Program Manager Sara Glidden and Lindiana have been working with the Department of Early Education and Care to provide support for their new Educator Discounts Directory, which promotes cultural organizations that provide discounts for educators. The webpage will debut during Teacher Appreciation Week, starting May 4.
- Lindiana has continued planning and advisory work with MA Housing for their Creative Placemaking Conference taking place on Wednesday, June 17, 2026, at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel in Norwood. Lindiana will also table at the conference to promote the benefits of the Card to Culture program to MA Housing Resident Coordinators and Managers. There will be an expected attendance of up to 500 resident coordinators participating in the conference.

Cross Program Support

Organizations Team has been working across teams to support the YouthReach, BIPOC Centered Self Identification, Creative Experiences program, and grant celebrations across the state.