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Power of culture

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

**Minutes of the Meeting of Mass Cultural Council's
Executive Committee
Thursday, August 13, 2026**

Online Meeting

Council Members Present:

- Ché Anderson, Chair
- Jo-Ann W. Davis, Vice Chair
- Cecil Barron Jensen
- Simone Early
- Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
- Julie Wake

Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Present:

- David Slatery, Acting Executive Director
- Ann Petruccelli Moon, Acting Chief of Staff
- Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
- Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
- Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager

Chair Ché Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:03am and asked Acting Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to read the Open Meeting Law statement. He then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their last meeting held on June 17, 2026. If they had, he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Julie Wake moved to approve the minutes; Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2026 Executive Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Ché welcomed Committee Members and staff to the meeting. He shared that he has regularly spent time in the Agency's administrative offices in recent months, meeting with staff and the senior leadership team. He thanked everyone for being so accommodating; he thinks the staff is fantastic.

Ché said the Executive Director search process would be slightly different from what was initially discussed. Rather than issuing a large RFP for a search firm and conducting a six-month process, the Council will move toward a more targeted 16- to 18-week process and hire an individual consultant, if needed, to manage the search. The goal is to leverage partners, work efficiently, and find the right person to lead the next chapter of the organization.

Ché shared that many people have agreed to serve on the search task force, but those who are not on the task force should not feel excluded. He envisioned a group made up of Council Members, partners, and a wide range of other stakeholders. The task force will help narrow the field to semifinalists, who will then be brought before the Council and staff so they can ask questions. Ché said the next Executive Director will need to be comfortable being out in the community engaging with people, and the search itself should reflect that approach rather than happen in a silo.

He also highlighted a planned survey of the sector, which he said would be conducted alongside the search process. There are many people with thoughts, concerns, and questions about the Council, and that it is important to hear directly from the field about what is happening, where there are opportunities, what the Council is doing well, and where it could do better. He said the goal is to cast a wide net and ensure that people across the Commonwealth have an opportunity to participate.

Ché said initial work on the process would take place over the next two weeks, with a larger meeting of the task force and partners planned for September. The initial goal is to have a new Executive Director in place early next year. In response to Simone's question, Ché confirmed that a written description of the process would be shared with the Board.

Julie asked for more information about the survey and who would be included. Ché said that since taking the role, it has been important to him to meet with as many stakeholders as possible. He said the survey would give everyone—from the smallest artisan to the largest organization—an opportunity to have a voice. He emphasized the importance of reaching people throughout the Commonwealth and asking what they are hearing, what they are seeing, what best practices the Agency may not yet be engaged in, and what the Agency is doing well or could do better.

Julie emphasized the importance of ensuring that the survey reaches every part of the Commonwealth, including the Berkshires, the Cape and Islands, and other areas outside Boston. Ché said the Council's leadership and members represent different parts of the state and can help broaden the reach. He also said the Agency's mailing lists and partnerships would be important tools.

Jen said the survey will be distributed through the Agency's Grants Management System (GMS) to approximately 30,000 people with active email addresses. The Public Affairs team will also distribute it through the e-newsletter, creating an overlapping audience. Jen noted that the Agency received approximately 3,000 responses to a previous search-related survey and has conducted large-scale surveys in connection with pandemic recovery grant

programs and strategic planning. She asked Council members to help share the survey within their communities.

Julie said the approach was smart because artists and organizations would feel like they were part of the process if they had an opportunity to provide feedback. She said the timing was also appropriate, given the amount of time that had passed since Michael's departure.

Cecil asked how the survey would be integrated into the search and whether the information would be provided to the consultant. Ché said the survey would go out as any consultant is brought into the process. He envisioned having weeks of survey data before semifinalists are selected. The information would help shape the search documents and inform the eventual selection.

Cecil asked how a search consultant would be selected. Ché clarified that the Council would not be hiring a traditional search firm but rather looking at individual consultants to manage the search operations. He said the Council was considering several options and had received recommendations and offers of assistance.

Julie asked whether the survey would be conducted after the final candidates were identified. Ché clarified that it would begin as soon as any consultant is brought on. Julie noted that the survey could also serve as a search tool and asked whether the job description would be part of the process. Ché said the job description would help inform the survey. He said he did not expect the survey to reveal anything completely unexpected, but that it could help identify more specific traits and would also be a useful tool for the new Executive Director.

Simone asked how the Agency would assess potentially thousands of survey responses. Ché said he had experience with a similar survey for another board, where community feedback helped identify both expected and surprising findings and led to deeper conversations with staff about areas for growth. He said the survey presents an opportunity to understand how impactful the Agency is across different communities and to identify opportunities for the organization as a statewide entity.

Simone asked whether any consultant would simply be selected directly. Ché said that, based on the scope of work, he did not believe the Council needed to go through a traditional procurement process. He said the work would be structured as a focused scope rather than a large procurement.

Dave added that the search task force would develop the scope of work. He said the consultant would effectively serve as staff to the Council to conduct the search, rather than as a large search firm under a large contract. He noted that funding already exists in the budget for an executive search, which would be sufficient to cover the consultant.

Ché then turned the meeting over to Dave for the Acting Executive Director's report.

Dave said it had been a very busy period, with staff working both externally and internally. He said that after 14 years at the Council, he restated that he considers working for a state arts agency the best job in the world, but that karmically one had to pay for that because July and August are the busiest months due to the state budget timing. He noted that his role has shifted over the years from directly preparing all of the spending plan materials to reviewing and presenting materials that were created by other staff, and gave credit to the staff for the significant amount of work involved. He specifically recognized Ann for pulling the process together, Jen in her role as Acting Deputy Director, and the Fiscal, Public Affairs, and Advancement teams.

Dave said the Agency had fared well during the current budget process, then went on to highlight the work underway around STEM to STEAM. He said the initiative is making significant inroads in communities and that the Council has learned a great deal about the continued strength of arts and culture as a desired career choice for teens in Massachusetts and nationally. He also noted that the Agency's MITx arts entrepreneurship course had strong reach, with over 1,400 participants, mainly from Massachusetts but also representing 81 different countries.

He then took a moment to share that, concurrently with this meeting, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' LEAD Conference was in the process of presenting Program Officer Charles Baldwin with an award for excellence for his career-long efforts to promote and enhance accessibility.

Dave also highlighted his recent engagements and visits to the Concord Museum, the Berkshire Museum, and a public reading of Moby-Dick at Herman Melville's Arrowhead estate in Pittsfield.

Dave concluded, noting this is his second time serving as Acting Executive Director and his second time presenting a spending plan.

Cecil thanked Dave for his work, and Julie thanked him for his participation in the Moby-Dick event. Dave noted that Brian Boyles had also attended.

Ché then asked Bethann Steiner for her Legislative and Public Affairs update.

Bethann shared that Mass Cultural Council entered the 2025–2026 legislative session with four priorities: securing strong annual state funding for arts and culture, maintaining capital investment in the Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF), expanding CFF eligibility, and formally recognizing the connection between arts, creativity, and STEM by changing STEM to STEAM in state law. The biggest success was funding: Mass Cultural Council received just under \$27 million in FY26 and a record \$28.1 million in FY27, the largest state appropriation in the Agency's history. In addition, both the FY26 and FY27 capital spending plans included \$10 million for CFF, supporting cultural organizations and municipalities in maintaining, improving, and modernizing cultural facilities across the Commonwealth.

On policy, legislation to broaden CFF eligibility advanced, and language requested by Mass Cultural Council was incorporated into the Senate version of

the Mass Wins Act. If retained in the final bill and signed into law, primarily cultural municipally owned facilities would be eligible for CFF assistance regardless of the building's age or size, although tribal government facilities did not get included in the provision. The STEAM legislation also received a favorable committee report and attracted 51 House co-sponsors. Meanwhile, the Mass Wins Act also has brought arts and culture more directly into the state's economic development agenda, with proposals for a \$1 million cultural, entertainment, and nightlife microgrant program, a new downtown vitality capital grant program, and capital funding for arts, culture, and the creative economy, including public art, cultural wayfinding, performance spaces, and historic district improvements.

She recognized the Public Affairs team – Dawn Heinen, Christian Kelly, and Carmen Plazas, as well as the Programs and Fiscal teams for their hard work in preparing the FY27 spending plan. The Public Affairs team is preparing website updates and print materials and will share the news broadly following the August Council Meeting, pending the Council's approval of the FY27 spending plan. Public convenings are also planned for the fall.

Julie asked about the Council's STEM to STEAM work, noting that the initiative had been discussed by the Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council previously. She said she understood the rebranding as a first step but wanted to know whether there would be a second step that would establish a more concrete framework for what the addition of the arts means in practice. She said she was particularly interested in whether there would be strategic planning around implementing the arts component.

Dave stated that the immediate goal is to get STEM to STEAM on the map. The Agency is working with several partners to broaden the idea that arts and creativity are an essential part of STEM. Dave cited research from the World Economic Forum identifying creativity as one of the most desirable traits in new hires. He said that due to AI, analytics and technical skills were less needed, but creativity is an important missing element, and that creativity can be taught and strengthened through use.

Dave said the Council has an opportunity to encourage greater use of arts and creativity throughout the broader economy. He noted that STEM has a significant spending profile and said the arts could benefit from being more closely connected to that work. Dave invited anyone interested in participating to join in the effort. He said the STEAM Subcommittee, which currently includes approximately eight or nine people, would develop recommendations for the statutory STEM Advisory Council.

Julie said she would like to participate and expressed particular interest in the connection to the creative economy.

There were no further questions, and Che asked Dave and Jen to present the FY27 Budget and Program Allocations Plan.

Dave and Jen gave the FY27 Budget and Program Allocations Plan presentation. The plan outlines anticipated revenue sources, key investment

areas, and grantmaking priorities for the Agency in FY27. After the Executive Committee meeting, the FY27 grant recommendations for most Mass Cultural Council grant programs based on this plan will be presented to the Programs Committee, and Advancement spending will be presented to the Advancement Committee. Pending Committee approval and recommendation, the plan and the recommendations will be voted on by the full Council on August 27, 2026. Dave shared that a more detailed memo was included in the meeting materials and that the presentation provided a broad overview. He said the work is connected directly to the Agency's Strategic Plan and referred members to the spending plan memo for additional detail. There were no questions for Dave or Jen, and Ché asked for a motion and a second to recommend that the Council approve the FY27 Budget and Program Allocations Plan. Julie moved to make the recommendation; Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote, it was

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee recommends that the Council approve the recommendation to the Programs Committee, Advancement Committee, and full Council the FY27 Budget and Program Allocation Plan presented to the Executive Committee on August 13, 2026.

Ché then asked Dave to present the next agenda item: approval for an out-of-state travel request. Dave explained that travel by the Executive Director that exceeds a cost of \$1,000 must come before the Executive Committee for pre-approval. He requested authorization to attend the annual National Assembly of State Arts Agencies conference in Washington, D.C., in October at a cost of at least \$1,900. Dave said he has attended 11 of the past 14 years and finds the conference valuable. There was no discussion. Jo-Ann moved to approve the travel request; Julie seconded the motion. By roll call vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the staff-recommended Out-of-State Travel Request presented to the Executive Committee on August 13, 2026.

The Council then moved to the final agenda item: reviewing and approving the agenda for the August 27, 2026 Council Meeting. There were no questions or discussion. Iván Espinoza-Madrigal moved to approve the agenda; Cecil Barron Jensen seconded the motion. By roll call vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee approve the draft August 27, 2026 Mass Cultural Council Agenda presented to the Executive Committee.

Ché, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:05 a.m.