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Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee Meeting

Thursday, August 13, 2026

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Agenda
Mass Cultural Council
Programs Committee Meeting
Thursday, August 13, 2026

1:00 – 2:30 PM

Broadcast Meeting

The meeting will be livestreamed on
[Mass Cultural Council's YouTube channel](#)

Meeting materials will be posted online under
[Governing Council Meeting Schedule](#)
"August 13, 2026, Programs Committee Meeting"
on Mass Cultural Council's website

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order – Open Meeting Law Notice

2. Minutes

Vote

- 2a. Minutes of the Meeting Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee –
June 17, 2026

3. Reports - FY27 Grants and Program Plan

4. Acting Executive Director Report

- 4a. Conflict of Interest Notifications

FY27 Grant and Program Recommendations

Vote

5. Partnership & Service Grants

- 5a. Mass Humanities
5b. New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)
5c. MASSCreative
5d. Massachusetts Poet Laureate
5e. Legislative Mandates (Appendix A)

6. Organizations

- 6a. Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations (Appendix B & Appendix C)

7. Communities

- 7a. Cultural District Investment Grants (Appendix D)
- 7b. Local Cultural Councils (Appendix E)
- 7c. Tribal Cultural Councils

8. Arts Education & Youth

- 8a. YouthReach (Appendix F and G)
- 8b. Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

9. Equity and Inclusion

- 9a. Creative Experiences (Appendix H)
- 9b. UP Innovation Fund Grants (Appendix I)
- 9c. Equity, Inclusion, and Access Grants

10. Adjourn



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Open Meeting Law Statement

(Virtual)

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 the Mass Cultural Council's website 48 hours or more 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 a virtual meeting held under the Open Meeting Law as modified under current law to permit online meetings. This meeting is being broadcast to the public on a publicly available YouTube channel as described in the posted meeting notice. Instructions on how to contact the Council with questions or problems accessing the broadcast are also included in such notice. Only Council members, staff, and invited guests will be provided access to the Zoom platform hosting the meeting.

As a safety measure, in order to prevent disruption of the meeting or non-public communications among the participants, the Chair, Vice Chair, and Executive Committee of Mass Cultural Council have asked staff to implement the following protocols for participants in online meetings of Mass Cultural Council or its committees:

- Any "chat" or similar function on the Zoom platform hosting the meeting shall be disabled.
- Other than Council members or participants specifically recognized by the Chair of the meeting, all Zoom platform participants will be muted and have no ability to share media or documents, or project or type images or text.

- All participants on the Zoom platform may be required to enter a waiting room and digitally sign in before being admitted.
- Any attendee on the Zoom platform who nonetheless causes a disruption will be summarily removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

This meeting is not a public hearing; 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.

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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Resolutions

Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee

Thursday, August 13, 2026

(In advance of the 170th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council on August 27, 2026)

Section 2:

RESOLVED: To approve the Minutes of the Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee Meeting dated June 17, 2026, in the form presented.

Sections 5 -9

WHEREAS the Massachusetts State Budget for Fiscal 2027 has been signed into law and contains an appropriation of \$27,348,072 plus \$758,000 in earmarks) for the Mass Cultural Council for FY27 (the "FY27 State Budget"); and

WHEREAS, previously today Mass Cultural Council's Executive Committee recommended to the Council for approval a draft of the FY27 Budget and Program Allocation Plan submitted by staff; and

WHEREAS, based on such Plan staff has recommended grant allocations for Mass Cultural Council programs to the Programs Committee at its meeting on August 13, 2026 ("Programs Committee Meeting"),

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: That the Programs Committee recommends that the Council approve the allocation of grants and processes and procedures presented at the Programs Committee Meeting in accordance with the following resolutions:

Section 5(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council a grant to Mass Humanities totaling \$1,032,234 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council a grant to New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) of \$70,000, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(c)

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council a grant to MASSCreative for \$30,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(d)

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council a grant to Regie Gibson, the Massachusetts Poet Laureate, for \$25,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 5(e)

RESOLVED: To recommend to the Council funding of the \$758,000 of legislative earmarks as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting

Section 6(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend endorsement of the approach by staff to provide \$7,350,000 in unrestricted operating support grant to cultural organizations under both the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend up to \$870,000 in Cultural District grants as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend an allocation to the Local Cultural Councils totaling \$5,850,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(c)

RESOLVED: To recommend up to \$71,250 allocation to Tribal Cultural Councils as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 8(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend grant allocation to the YouthReach program in the amount of \$1,950,000, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 8(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend a Creative Youth Development and Education grants in the amount of \$36,000 to the Youth Arts Impact Network with EdVestors and \$25,000 in support of the NEA-funded Poetry Out Loud program, all as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 9(a)

RESOLVED: To recommend approval of the Creative Experiences program grants totaling \$3,442,500 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 9(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council \$465,000 in UP Innovation Fund Grants, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 9(c)

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

General

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the ability of staff to re-allocate unused grant funds for any program to any other recommended program as described throughout the memo presented to the Programs Committee.



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

**Minutes
Mass Cultural Council
Programs Committee Meeting
Wednesday, June 17, 2026**

Online Meeting

Committee Members Present:

- Cecil Barron Jensen, Co-Chair
- Julie Wake, Co-Chair
- Ché Anderson, Council Chair
- Jo-Ann Davis, Council Vice Chair
- Emily Bramhall
- Simone Early
- Donna Haghighat
- Ashley Occhino

Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Present:

- David Slatery, Acting Executive Director
- Ann Petruccelli Moon, Acting Chief of Staff
- Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
- Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
- Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
- Dan Blask, Program Manager
- Sara Glidden, Program Manager
- Lisa Simmons, Program Manager
- Kortney Adams, Program Officer
- Charles Baldwin, Program Officer
- Kelly Bennett, Program Officer
- Summer Confuorto, Program Officer
- Amy Chu, Program Officer
- Lindiana Flores, Program Officer
- Kalyn King, Program Officer
- Lillian Lee, Program Officer
- Allison Rosenthal, Grants Management System Officer

Co-Chair Cecil Barron Jensen called the meeting to order at 1:05pm and asked Acting Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to read the Open Meeting Law statement. Cecil then asked if Committee members had reviewed the minutes from their last meeting held on February 11, 2026. If they had, she would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Co-Chair Julie Wake moved to approve the minutes; Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Simone Early abstained and that Ché Anderson had not yet joined the meeting, it was unanimously

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the February 11, 2026
Programs Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Cecil then welcomed Committee Members and staff to the meeting and shared that she and Julie had met with the Senior Director of Program Operations, Jen Lawless, earlier that morning. She commended Jen for the outstanding work she had done preparing the presentation and noted that staff would be joining the meeting to present with Jen. Reflecting on recent grant celebrations on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, Cecil said it was impossible not to be struck by the impact that Mass Cultural Council funding has on communities, arts organizations of all sizes, and the people they serve. She encouraged members of the Programs Committee who had not attended a grant celebration to do so next year, describing them as valuable opportunities to see the work firsthand and thank legislators for their continued support. Seeing Bethann on the call served as a reminder of how important legislative engagement is at these events. Cecil congratulated everyone involved in organizing the celebrations. She then asked Jen to begin her presentation.

A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Jen invited members to ask questions throughout the presentation. She described the meeting as an opportunity to reflect on the past year and emphasized that the presentation represented only a small portion of the work completed by the Programs team. She recognized the dedication of the staff who administer the programs and acknowledged the contributions of the Public Affairs and Business Operations teams, noting that successful grantmaking depends not only on awarding grants but also on communicating their impact and ensuring they are administered effectively. Members were encouraged to use the presentation to learn, ask questions, and think about future opportunities. Jen then shared her screen and began walking through the presentation, explaining that the first portion would review FY26 while the latter part would focus on high-level FY27 priorities.

During discussion of application trends, Jo-Ann asked about the change in applications from FY25 to FY26. Jen clarified that there was not only the new Organizational Grants for Organizations (OGO) program, but the old Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP) reflected in the data as well. She noted that many new applications were for OGO and that it remained difficult to compare FY25 and FY26 directly because organizations were at different points in their grant cycles.

Jo-Ann commented that she is always struck by the relatively small percentage of individual applicants who receive funding compared to organizations. She wondered whether Mass Cultural Council should consider directing more funding toward individuals, noting that organizations often have multiple fundraising opportunities while individual artists have fewer options.

Dave observed that outreach efforts have significantly increased over the past several years, and so the number of individual applicants has grown substantially compared to earlier years, particularly following outreach efforts that began around the pandemic recovery funding.

Cecil added that although the total number of applicants has declined from pandemic-era highs, the decrease has not been as steep as expected. She speculated that many individuals who first became connected to Mass Cultural Council during the pandemic have remained engaged with its programs.

Jen agreed that these were important observations. She shared that staff anticipates a significant increase in individual applications in FY27 because many artists who received grants in FY23 are becoming eligible to apply again after their waiting period. She emphasized that supporting artists remains a priority. While organizations receive much of the Agency's funding, those organizations employ artists, and final reports include data on the number of artists hired through funded projects. She suggested that incorporating this information into future reporting could provide a more complete picture of how investments in organizations also directly benefit artists.

Ashley Occhino asked whether inflation had been considered when evaluating grant amounts for individuals. She noted the anticipated increase in FY27 applications and asked whether staff had discussed how inflation has affected the impact of current grant awards compared to when the program began.

Jen explained that this is an ongoing discussion. She shared that she had recently compared the purchasing power of \$500 in 2019 to today and found it to be roughly equivalent to \$650. She explained that current individual grants are \$5,000, compared with the former fellowship model, which awarded \$15,000 grants to far fewer recipients. Mass Cultural Council intentionally lowered individual award amounts while increasing the total investment to support more artists. Determining the appropriate grant amount remains an ongoing conversation, particularly as organizations and artists continue to experience rising costs due to inflation.

Before moving into the program snapshots, Jen paused to take additional questions and reminded members that they were welcome to email her at any time with follow-up questions about specific programs or data.

Cecil remarked that receiving a Mass Cultural Council grant likely provides value beyond the funding itself. She suggested that being able to list Mass Cultural Council support on a résumé or in a biography likely carries professional recognition, even if that impact is difficult to measure.

Dan Blask agreed, stating that this reputational benefit is an important consideration when balancing grant amounts against the number of awards made. Across the various iterations of the Agency's grant programs for creative individuals—from fellowships to smaller professional development grants—artists have consistently reported that receiving a Mass Cultural Council grant strengthens their professional credentials and creates additional opportunities.

Julie added that this effect is visible through her work at the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod. Applicants who have support from Mass Cultural Council often present stronger funding requests because other funders recognize the value and credibility associated with support from the Agency.

Cecil thanked Julie for the example and suggested that as Mass Cultural Council continues to evaluate its individual artist programs, the professional recognition associated with an Agency award should be considered alongside the grant amount itself. She also wondered whether there might be additional ways for the Agency to provide that type of professional development and recognition to artists.

Jo-Ann agreed and said she would like the team to continue examining the issue over the coming year. She noted that nearly half of individual applicants appear to be new each year and supported exploring additional ways to recognize and support artists beyond direct grant funding.

Jen agreed that the discussion aligned closely with ongoing Advancement conversations. She noted that even during the years of unprecedented pandemic funding, the Agency was unable to meet the full level of demand. Staff continues exploring ways to leverage partnerships and additional resources to supplement grant funding and appreciated the observations about the professional recognition that already occurs organically through Mass Cultural Council support.

Jen then introduced the FY27 program overview, explaining that staff members would each present highlights from their respective programs and that questions would be held until the conclusion of the presentations. Staff presenters included Dan, Summer, Kortney, Sara, Lisa, Charles, Lindiana, Lillian, Lisa, and Jen for Creative Experiences.

Following the presentations, Jen invited members to share questions, comments, and feedback.

Cecil thanked all the presenters, commenting that it was enjoyable for Council members to hear directly from staff. She congratulated everyone on their work and expressed appreciation for the thoughtful presentations.

Simone remarked on the impressive volume of grant opportunities and asked how prospective applicants determine which program best fits their needs. She wondered whether this information was easy to find on the website.

Carmen explained that the Agency publishes a *Programs-at-a-Glance* guide each year – print and digital – which summarizes every opportunity, identifies whether each program serves organizations or individuals, and links directly to each program's webpage. The printed guide is distributed at events, shared with legislators, provided to prospective applicants, and always available digitally as a central resource.

Simone asked whether staff had considered using an AI chatbot that would allow someone to describe their project or organization and receive guidance on the most appropriate grant program.

Jen replied that the Agency has experimented with similar approaches, including eligibility quizzes. Over the past five years, staff has intentionally reduced the number of grant programs to simplify navigation. She noted that AI tools continue to evolve and that improving communication with applicants remains an ongoing priority.

Cecil observed that Council Members also play an important role by becoming familiar with Mass Cultural Council's programs and helping connect artists and organizations in their communities with the appropriate staff and funding opportunities.

Simone agreed but explained that an interactive tool could make navigating the programs feel more accessible and user-friendly. While she regularly refers people to Mass Cultural Council, she felt that technology could offer another welcoming pathway for applicants.

Jen responded that some sister agencies are currently using AI chatbots, though they require significant staff oversight because every interaction must be reviewed. She reiterated that directing applicants to the correct program remains the priority and that staff will continue refining how information is communicated across the many different types of applicants served by the Agency.

Dave added that when meeting with communities across the state, he frequently connects people directly with members of the Programs team.

Jo-Ann commented that the presentation itself demonstrates how important it is for Council Members to understand the breadth of Mass Cultural Council's work. She described the presentation as informative, inspiring, and valuable because it consistently generates thoughtful discussion and deepens the Council's understanding of the programs.

Simone added that the presentation reinforces the message that everyone has the potential to receive a Mass Cultural Council grant, particularly applicants from smaller organizations.

Cecil complimented the team's ongoing attention to geographic equity throughout its grantmaking.

Dave then gave a brief Acting Executive Director's report. He noted the success of the Creative Sector Summit hosted by MassCreative, which drew approximately 350 attendees, many of whom expressed appreciation for Mass Cultural Council's work and programs. After thirteen years with the agency, he reflected on how rewarding it has been to spend more time meeting people throughout the Commonwealth during his months, thus far, as Acting Executive Director. He also highlighted the success of the events on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, and thanked Cecil and Emily for their leadership in curating those days and Julie for accompanying the team and participating in both events. Dave added that he had recently attended the New England Foundation for the Arts executive directors' retreat and reported that fellow state arts agencies view Massachusetts as a leader. He commended Jen and the Programs team for helping communicate Mass Cultural Council's impact during their presentation today.

Cecil remarked that although the Agency's grants may sometimes seem modest in size, they have an extraordinarily meaningful impact throughout the Commonwealth.

Jen then recognized Grants Managements System Program Officers Allison Rosenthal and Colin Baylor, emphasizing that the work is made possible by a collaborative team effort and that their work produced much of the data shared today. She expressed excitement about FY27 and noted that Bethann and the Public Affairs team also use the presentation to promote the Agency's work more broadly, helping share these stories with audiences across the state.

Bethann shared that the Public Affairs team was preparing a year-end blog post inspired by the work presented during the meeting. The post would be published the following week in conjunction with the Agency's final grant celebration event of the year on June 25 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. More than 100 attendees, including grantees, legislators and the Poet Laureate, were expected and the event would be held virtually via Zoom. She noted that the data presented during the meeting, along with ongoing conversations with the field, directly informs Mass Cultural Council's storytelling, advocacy efforts, blog posts, press releases, and broader communications strategy.

Cecil reminded members that a link to funding reports had been shared by Ann in the meeting chat and encouraged attendance at the June 25 event, noting that several Council members had already registered. She then adjourned the meeting at 2:27 p.m., with thanks extended to Committee Members and the entire Mass Cultural Council team.



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Conflict of Interest Notifications

Mass Cultural Council Members

Updated August 2026

1) **Ché Anderson**

- a. City of Worcester
- b. College of the Holy Cross
- c. Ecotarium
- d. ICA Boston
- e. Institute of Contemporary Art
- f. Museum of Worcester
- g. New Balance or New Balance Foundation
- h. New Commonwealth Fund
- i. Rose Kennedy Greenway
- j. The Hanover Theatre
- k. The Quin House
- l. UMass Chan Medical School
- m. Worcester Art Museum
- n. Worcester Art Museum
- o. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
- p. Worcester Historical Museum
- q. Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce

2) **Rhonda Anderson**

- a. Mass Humanities

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

3) Emily Bramhall

4) Thomas Bernard

- a. Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

5) Jo-Ann Davis

- a. MASSCreative
- b. Springfield Museums
- c. The Care Center

6) Vinny deMacedo

- a. Bridgewater State University
- b. The Mayflower District, Scouting USA
- c. Plymouth Area Chamber of Commerce
- d. South Shore Chamber of Commerce
- e. Old Colony YMCA
- f. Pilgrim Hall

7) Simone Early

8) Ivan Espinosa-Madrigal

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

9) Donna Haghighat

- a. WAM Theater

10) Cecil Barron Jensen

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

11) David Kong

12) Joyce Linehan

- a. Fuller Craft Museum
- b. Massachusetts College of Art & Design

13) Anika Lopes

- a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation

14) Petrina Martin**15) Diane Asadorian Masters****16) Allyce J. Najimy****17) Ashley Occhino**

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

18) Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

19) Julie Wake

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



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Conflict of Interest Procedures - Mass Cultural Council

Grant Votes

Prior to any Council or Programs Committee meeting, staff will compile a list of conflicts of interest by identifying any potential recipient of Mass Cultural Council funds to be voted on at that meeting to which any Council member has an identified connection. Unless a Council member indicates otherwise, it is assumed that the Council member will abstain from all discussion and any vote regarding such grantee.

A document listing these possible conflicts of interest (the "conflicts list") will be distributed to the board at the beginning of the meeting.

Before a motion for a vote, the Chair should refer to the list and 1) ask the members present if the conflicts list is accurate and if the members identified will abstain from votes and discussion for the relevant organizations as identified on the conflicts list and 2) ask if any other conflicts exist which should be added to the conflicts list.

After addressing any necessary corrections or additions, the Chair will then ask for a motion approving the grant/allocation recommendations, noting that the Council members noted on the conflict list will abstain from discussion and votes for certain organizations in accordance with the conflicts list. It will not be necessary for any member with a conflict to leave the room as long as such member does not participate in any decision regarding the affected organization, and it is specifically noted in the minutes that such member abstained from all discussion and votes regarding the specified organization.

Sample script for a meeting vote:

CHAIR: We will now consider votes approving the FY27 grant recommendations. Please note the conflicts list that has been distributed. Staff members have compiled these lists to identify members who have a real or potential conflict of interest in connection with this

vote. Please indicate 1) if there are any inaccuracies on the list or 2) if any additional conflicts need to be disclosed.

[If any corrections or additions are noted by board members, the conflicts list will be amended at this time]

Noting the abstentions disclosed on the [corrected] conflicts list, the Chair now calls for a motion to approve the grant recommendations for this program.

Then, upon motion duly made and seconded, with the abstentions noted above, it was

VOTED: ...]"

In the minutes recording this vote, the following will be included:

[Council Member X] disclosed that they would abstain from any discussion or vote regarding the provision of a grant or other assistance to {list affiliated organizations}



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FY27 Grants and Programs Recommendations

August 2026

To: Mass Cultural Council
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Colin Baylor, Allie Rosenthal
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 Grant and Program Recommendations

Overview

In FY27, Mass Cultural Council is poised to make an estimated 2,600 grants through its programs totaling approximately \$27.77 million.

In FY26, across all direct programs and including the Local Cultural Council Program, we had over **19,000 applications** come in through our grants management system. We presented analysis of our FY26 grant making to the Programs Committee in June. The presentation is available upon request.

The program teams, including the grant management system team, put in an immense amount of work and time supporting applicants, potential applicants, and grantees. We expect a similar volume in FY27. The following memos describe the FY27 grantmaking in more detail. In all cases, staff is requesting the Committee recommend the approval of the following requests at its August 27 meeting.

All grant allocation amounts below are based upon the Council's approval of the FY27 Spending Plan.

**** Please note:** There are two programs - **Grants for Creative Individuals** and the **Gaming Mitigation Program** – that are not included in this memo and will be brought to the Programs Committee and Council for the February meetings.

FY27 Partnership & Service Grants

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 Partnership & Service Grants

Summary

In this section, you will find proposed information on our partnership and service grants. Legislative earmarks have also been included for your reference; however, these payments are directed by the legislature, and our role is simply to pay the funds as a passthrough entity.

Recommendations

Table 1: Partnership and Service Grants

Recipient	Initiative	Grant
Mass Humanities	Partnership Grant	\$1,032,234
New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)	New England State Touring (NEST)/Annual Grant	\$70,000
MASSCreative	Passthrough - Artist Stipends at State House Event(s)	\$30,000
Regie Gibson	Massachusetts Poet Laureate	\$25,000
Total		\$1,157,234

Mass Humanities: In the FY27 budget we are recommending \$1,032,234 for our annual partnership grant with the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities (Mass Humanities). The proposed partnership award for FY27 is approximately 5% (\$49,178) greater than the amount awarded in FY26. The percentage increase is the same as the percentage increase in Mass Cultural Council's FY27 state appropriation from the amount received for FY26 (in both cases, after earmarks). We have an agreement with Mass Humanities that this grant will increase or decrease at the same percentage rate as our state appropriation from one year to the next which is documented in a signed Memorandum of Agreement.

This partnership goes back more than twenty years. The partnership is renewed each year through a vote of the Council.

New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA): In providing an annual grant to NEFA, Mass Cultural Council considers annual funding requests from NEFA for projects and activities that specifically benefit the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In addition, Mass Cultural Council requires an annual accounting of NEFA's expenditure of any Mass Cultural Council funding showing of the benefits to Massachusetts. We work closely with and collaborate with NEFA throughout the year as an important regional and local arts organization representing the region on issues of mutual interest.

Staff proposes FY27 funding of **\$70,000** to NEFA in accordance with the support structure from the states which NEFA has proposed. In FY26, Massachusetts provided \$70,000 to NEFA.

We will have available upon request from members a report from NEFA detailing the use of our FY26 award of \$70,000 which was used to support its New England States Touring (NEST) Program for the benefit of Massachusetts artists and venues.

MassCreative: For the fourth year in a row, Mass Cultural Council will join the coalition co-hosting Creative Sector Day at the State House - a day on Beacon Hill to celebrate and amplify the contributions of artists, creatives, cultural nonprofits, and creative businesses in Massachusetts with our elected leaders. This day-long event will feature performances and displays by artists across the Commonwealth, presentations by cultural organizations and storytelling by creative businesses. This is NOT a lobby day, but a visibility and celebration day that will acknowledge the economic impacts and contributions of the creative sector and help build public support for artists, creatives and cultural organizations. As co-host, we propose awarding **\$30,000** to compensate performing artists and cultural organizations at the event. As a matter of administrative simplicity, Mass Cultural Council will award the funds to MassCreative, who will pay the individual artists and organizations directly.

Massachusetts Poet Laureate: In February 2025, Governor Maura T. Healey announced Executive Order no. 640, establishing the position of Poet Laureate in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The order specified that Mass Cultural Council administers the position's application process. We propose that our Agency provide a grant in the amount of **\$25,000** to the selected poet for the second year of their appointment, to acknowledge the unique significance of the Poet Laureate position. Poet Laureate Duties:

- Encouraging poetry appreciation and creative expression
- Public events, readings, creating occasion-specific poems, and
- Advising the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on poetry in schools

In FY26, the stipend was paid to the Poet Laureate through a funded legislative earmark. In FY27, while there is an earmark, it is not funded. Therefore, we propose funding the stipend from our general appropriation.

Legislative Mandates

Earmarks: The budget included 19 earmarks totaling **\$783,000** in our budget line item. Eighteen were funded. The \$25,000 Poet Laureate stipend will be funded from our appropriation as described above. A list of the 18 funded earmarks can be found in **Appendix A**.

FY27 Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee, Colin Baylor
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations

Summary

In this section, you will find proposed information on the operating support grant programs for nonprofit cultural organizations and Cultural Affiliates (programs with a parent organization) in Mass Cultural Council's programs: **Operating Support for Organizations (OGO)**, and the **Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP or "Portfolio")**.

A total of **\$7,350,000** has been allocated towards these grant programs to support 404 organizations. This amount is an increase of \$150,000 over the allocation for organization support programs for FY26 and includes the amount allocated to the Portfolio and the Operating Grants for Organizations.

Background

In 2021, the CIP team was directed to conduct a review of the existing Cultural Investment Portfolio program with the goals of maintaining the values that are important to grantees – the availability of unrestricted operating support that is reliable and predictable – while also centering equity in our evaluation and program revisions. We made our first announcement about changes coming to the Portfolio program in April 2022. The changes fell into two categories: the sunseting of the existing Portfolio grant program, and the launch of the new Operating Grants for Organizations program.

Sunsetting the Portfolio: The existing Portfolio program will be phased out through FY29. For purposes of transitioning into the new program, current Portfolio grantees were randomly assigned to a final year of support from the Portfolio grant program. After the final year of support, an organization must successfully apply to the new Operating Grants for Organizations program for continued operating support going forward. Organizations were sorted by budget size, and then randomly assigned to a fiscal year for Portfolio grant expiration, with some adjustments to address geographical distribution. The final year for Portfolio support is aligned with the application cycles of the Operating Grants for Organizations, so that former Portfolio recipients may apply to the Operating Grants for Organizations.

Operating Grants for Organizations: The first application cycle of the Operating Grants for Organizations was launched in March 2024 and offered a five-year funding commitment starting in FY25. In October 2025, 160 organizations were recommended for grants from this program.

The second round of Operating Grants for Organizations opened in February 2025 for funding that would begin in FY26. There were two significant changes to the program. 1) the commitment for this program is 4 grant years, reduced from five, and 2) the program will be open for applications every other year, alternating with the YouthReach program applications.

This means that successful applicants received a grant for FY26 – FY29, and that the next application for this program will be in the spring of 2027, for grants from FY28 – 31, subject to the legislative appropriations, and the spending plans approved by the Council.

Organizations moving from Operating Support to YouthReach: Fifty-five grantees from Operating Grants or Portfolio applied to YouthReach in spring of 2026. Twenty-eight of these organizations were successful in their application, and chose to accept the YouthReach grant, and forfeit the Operating Grant or Portfolio grant. For these organizations, the YouthReach grant was more advantageous, either because the grant was for a larger amount, or the funding commitment was for a longer time.

Since twenty-eight organizations will move from OGO/CIP to YouthReach, we recommend that twenty-eight organizations that applied to OGO for FY26 should be offered one-year contracts from the Operating Grants for Organizations program. This will provide support for additional organizations and will minimize the impact to grant calculations in the formula-based programs. The organizations that were selected were the next highest scoring applicants in each budget group/review panel, proportional to the organizations that moved to YouthReach. These organizations will be eligible to apply for multi-year support in the next application cycle for Operating Grants in 2027.

Addition of One-year grantees supported by increase in program allocation: The proposed FY27 Spending Plan includes an increase of \$150,000 to the allocation for the formula-based programs. We recommend that this allocation be used to add ten additional one-year grantees to the formula-based grants. The organizations that were selected were the next highest scoring applicants, following the organizations that are proposed for replacing the grantees that moved to YouthReach.

Grant Awards

The awards for the Operating Grants for Organizations are calculated with the remaining Portfolio organizations in one funding formula.

Grant awards are based on a formula that takes into account a three-year average of an organization's cash expenses (Formula Expenses). Awards are recalculated annually, and vary based on the resources allocated to the Organizations grants by the Council, as well as whether an organization's Formula Expenses increase or decrease.

We will continue to implement Equity Impact Points (described in previous Council write-ups) as part of the funding formula calculation, which will increase grant

amounts for organizations that meet certain criteria. This includes twenty-two organizations that are identified as financially stressed based on the Financial Health analysis protocol that we have developed, and we also support **BIPOC-Centered** organizations (this is a self-identification for organizations that are BIPOC led and/or run, and whose primary mission, programming and/or practices explicitly and specifically reflect and serve one or more communities that self-identify as BIPOC).

Recommendations

Additional information about the process can be found in **Appendix B**.

The list of 404 recommended FY27 grantees is provided in **Appendix C**.

To the extent not all such \$7,350,000 set aside can be used in FY27, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

- Sara Glidden, Program Manager, Organizations (617) 858-2710
- Kalyn King, Program Officer, Creative Experiences and Organizations (617) 858-2718
- Lillian Lee, Program Officer, Organizations and Gaming Mitigation (617) 858-2737
- Lindiana Flores, Program Officer, Organizations, and Card to Culture program 617-858-2826

Cultural District Investment Grants

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons, Timothea Pham, Allie Rosenthal
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: Cultural District Investment Grants

Summary

For FY27, we are recommending an \$870,000 allocation to the Cultural Districts Initiative to support placemaking and placekeeping efforts in prospective districts. This represents level funding from FY26. Staff is recommending a \$15,000 grant per district, consistent with what was approved in FY26. There are currently fifty (58) districts designated.

Background

To receive funds, a municipality must apply through a streamlined acceptance form agreeing to allocate the funds in support of Cultural District activities and goals. Unless otherwise directed, the funds will go to the municipality to disburse. Applications are reviewed internally by staff. The grant must be spent in FY27, and an Annual Report is due in July 2027.

The Cultural District Designation program relaunched in FY27 [with new guidelines](#). Applications for new designation opened July 7, 2026, following an information session for prospective districts. The full application deadline is February 8, 2027.

Recertification for existing Cultural Districts began in March 2026 and continues on a separate track, with a deadline to recertify of March 2028, giving existing districts ample time to meet updated requirements. Full program guidelines and the FY27 timeline are available on the [MCC website](#).

Recommendations

The FY27 grants to the current Cultural Council Districts can be found in **Appendix D**. Thank you for your ongoing support of the Cultural Districts Initiative program.

To the extent that not all of the \$870,000 set aside for districts can be used in FY27, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

Local Cultural Council Program

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons, Lauren Bjella, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Sommers Smith, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong, Allie Rosenthal
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 Local Cultural Council Allocations

Summary

This memo presents recommended allocations for each of Mass Cultural Council's 329 Local Cultural Councils (LCCs) in FY27. Mass Cultural Council's spending plan calls for an allocation of **\$5,850,000** to the Local Cultural Council Program. This figure represents an increase of \$150,000 (2.6%) from FY26. For reference, this chart summarizes the last 26 years of LCC Program allocations.

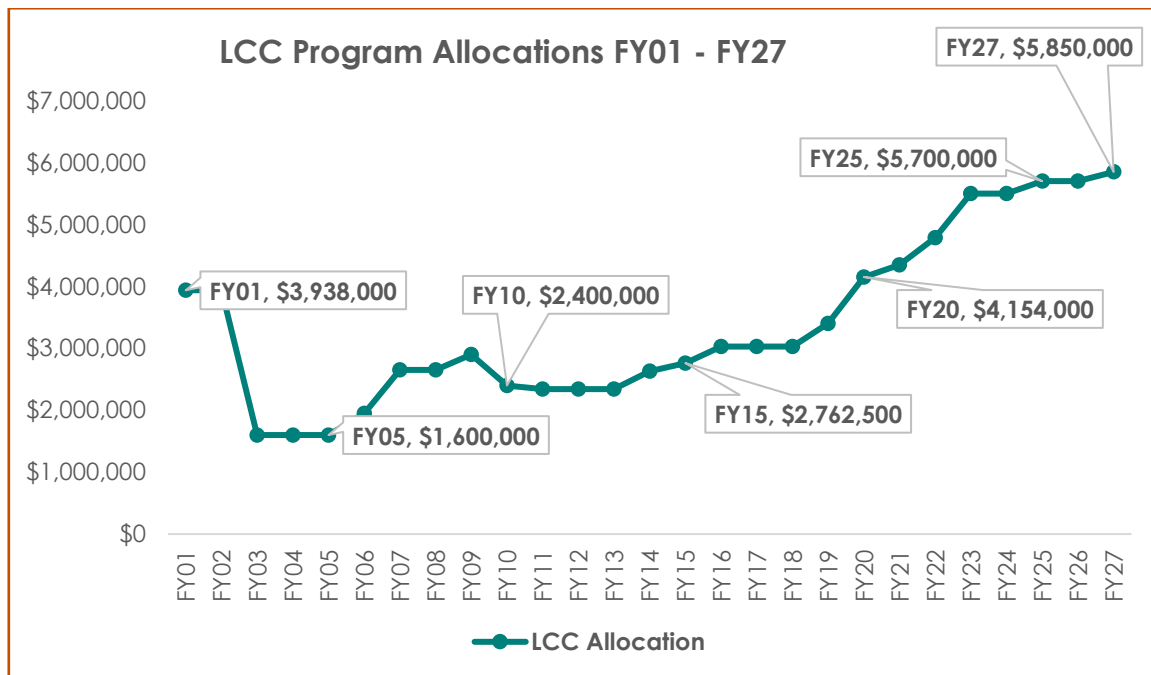


Figure 1 Local Cultural Council Allocations FY01- FY27

LCC Allocations

Consistent with Mass Cultural Council's enabling act, each council's individual allocation is determined by following the Department of Revenue's formula for distribution of lottery funds to each city and town, which is done using a state local aid formula, based on population and property values. It is weighted towards communities with lower property values and/or larger populations.

Due to the increase in the program allocation, 80% of LCCs will see modest increases of between 1% and 4% based on the formula. Increases range from \$100

to \$8,000 - the median increase is \$300. There are 66 LCCs whose allocation will not change from FY26. The minimum allocation a council will receive is \$5,700.

The recommended allocations for all 329 Local Cultural Councils are detailed in **Appendix E**.

Tribal Cultural Council Program

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Lisa Simmons, Allie Rosenthal
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 Tribal Cultural Council Program

Summary

The FY27 Spending Plan allocates **\$71,200** for the Tribal Cultural Council Program for 4 Tribal Cultural Councils. The recommended allocation per council is \$17,800, which is the average Local Cultural Council allocation. This represents an increase of \$475 per TCC.

Background

Mass Cultural Council recently completed a [Native American and Indigenous People's Equity Plan](#). While working on the plan, we also worked with a task force comprised of Native American and Indigenous people and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Commission on Indian Affairs (MCIA) to create an equivalent regranteeing program to our [Local Cultural Council Program](#) for Tribal Governments in recognition of their inherent tribal sovereignty and right to self-determination. The Tribal Cultural Council Program provides funding that Tribal Cultural Councils can regrant to the benefit of their community and use to support their own projects and initiatives; and is driven by local autonomy. TCCs can tailor the program to their unique goals, define what community benefit means to them, and set local priorities.

The current Tribal Cultural Councils are:

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

The Task Force recommended establishing two additional TCCs, one for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, and an Intertribal Cultural Council that would serve Native American and Indigenous communities with ties to Massachusetts that are not Federally, or state-recognized, and/or Native American and Indigenous people who currently reside in Massachusetts whose native lands or territories are outside Massachusetts. We are still actively in conversation about these, but we do not anticipate there would be ready to participate in FY27.

To the extent not all 4 TCCs spend their allocations during FY27, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any unused funds to other grant programs.

YouthReach

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Kortney Adams, Käthe Swaback, Colin Baylor
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 YouthReach Grants

Summary

The Artists & Youth Team is pleased to submit for approval our Agency's recommendations for 84 awards in the FY27 YouthReach program, totaling \$1,950,000. This represents an increase of \$80,000 from the FY26 approved amounts with an increase of 10 organizations. These grants support innovative Creative Youth Development programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences.

Background

For 33 years, YouthReach has nurtured the creativity and potential of young people through grants to programs that center youth voice, racial equity, and collective action. As part of Mass Cultural Council's ongoing work to build more accessible and equitable programs, the YouthReach application was streamlined this cycle to include:

- Broadened eligibility for schools to apply in any discipline
- A simplified application process removing the logic model and evaluative site visit requirements
- Establishment of two award ranges:
 - A \$20,000 minimum award
 - A \$26,000 award to acknowledge higher costs for organizations committed to addressing additional needs of young people by providing mental health and/or workforce development resources
- An end to the "YouthReach Partners" distinction, with all former grant recipients required to apply to be eligible for FY27 funding.
- A transition to 4-year funding cycles, with half of this cycle's grants awarded for 2 years and half for 4 years; staggered expirations will allow us to award 4-year grants every 2 years going forward.

Program Overview

The full [YouthReach Program Guidelines](#) are online, and a high-level summary follows:

Eligibility

- Applications were open to Massachusetts non-profit organizations; unincorporated organizations with a fiscal agent; pre-K-12 Schools; and federally recognized tribal, state, or municipal entities.
- Organizations must have operated a Creative Youth Development program for a minimum of 6 months between 2024 and 2026.
- Programs must be primarily arts, humanities, or interpretive sciences; provide a specific group of young people hands-on cumulative learning through creation; be designed so that participants have the option of multi-year participation; work with Massachusetts youth ages 4-24; and have a minimum budget of \$20,000 in cash expenses.
- Organizations needed to attest that their programs meet this definition: Creative Youth Development (CYD) is a commitment to supporting young people's stories, ideas, and dreams through creative expression and honoring their lived experiences. To create environments that promote Creative Youth Development, these three concepts must be present: Racial Equity and Social Justice, Youth Voice, and Collective Action.

Review Process

- Funding Priorities – modest rating advantage
 1. Applicants that are BIPOC Centered Organizations or BIPOC majority schools.
 2. Applicants that did not receive funding in the last three fiscal years, or that were applying for the first time.
 3. Applicants that completed the Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment prior to applying.
- Scored by reviewers from the Massachusetts creative/cultural sector based on how the applicants demonstrate strength in the following criteria:
 1. Program Design and Fiscal Management
 2. Community Engagement
 3. Equitable Practices
 4. CREATE: Youth Voice
 5. CONNECT: Relationships
 6. CATALYZE: Youth Leadership
 7. Outcomes
 8. **Optional** Mental Health/Workforce Development only impacted award amount
- Funding length determination: Highest rated applications recommended for 4-year grants, with subsequent applications recommended for 2-year grants

- Funding amount determination: Reviewer scores for the optional mental health/workforce development questions, with the highest scoring applications receiving the higher grant award.

Timeline

- Application opened February 5, 2026
- Application closed April 2, 2026
- Panelist Review process spanned the time between April 30 - June 5, 2026
- Recommended grant awards to Programs Committee, August 13, 2026
- Full Council vote at Council Meeting, August 27, 2026
- Grants announced by September 2026
- Grant celebrations throughout the Commonwealth in FY27, Council Members encouraged to attend, details to come.

Applications

- 210 total applications
- 166 eligible applications
- 84 recommended grants (approx. 51% of eligible applications)

Recommendations

In keeping with the Agency's Racial Equity Plan and D/deaf and Disability Equity Plan, we present relevant data points in reaching equity goals:

Table 2 Funding Priority Totals/Percentages for All Eligible Applications (166)

No recent grant	BIPOC	Accessibility Self-Assessment	Mental Health/Workforce Development
35	60	119	97
21.1%	36.1%	71.7%	58.4%

Table 3. Funding Priority Totals/Percentages for Recommended Grantees (84)

No recent grant	BIPOC	Accessibility Self-Assessment	Mental Health/Workforce Development
14	45	60	45
16.7%	53.6%	71.4%	53.6%

The list of YouthReach reviewers is provided in **Appendix F**. The recommended grantees are included in **Appendix G**.

Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Kortney Adams, Amy Chu, Käthe Swaback
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

Summary

We are pleased to present for your review recommendations for funding for the Youth Arts Impact Network and Poetry Out Loud.

FY27 Recommendations

Table 4. Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

Organization	Initiative	Grant
Edvestors	Youth Arts Impact Network (YAIN)	\$36,000
Huntington Theatre Company	Poetry Out Loud (POL)	\$25,000
Total		\$61,000

Youth Arts Impact Network (YAIN): Mass Cultural Council formalized our partnership with EdVestors in FY21 to support funding for the Youth Arts Impact Network. Since then, we have fostered our partnership with EdVestors to bring these services to potential and existing Creative Youth Development organizations and school-based partnership organizations outside of Boston.

YAIN is [responsive to the field](#), by helping organizations elevate their practices and track their ability to foster trust, cultivate relationships, and strengthen social connections. One large benefit of YAIN has been that organizations throughout the state have now been able to participate in quarterly networking opportunities with related, shared monthly resources. Organizations can also access the services of consultant Julia Gittleman, PhD for planning, evaluation, and program development support. In FY26, 26 organizations across the Commonwealth completed more than 100 pro bono technical support sessions over the course of the year. These organizations represented considerable geographic diversity and were of varying sizes and maturity. These sessions included survey design, logic model design, data analysis, and reporting.

In FY27, building on the [success of YAIN](#) over these past six years, we would like to continue to offer resources and access to best practices and innovations equitably across Massachusetts. We request to maintain our investment of \$36,000 to support the Youth Arts Impact Network in FY27 so that we may continue to strengthen our partnership with EdVestors, the 500+ community of Creative Youth Development practitioners, funders, and alumni who are part of the network.

This network is important given the current federal administration's policies and executive orders that are creating heightened pressures and uncertainties on nonprofits, especially those in the arts and culture sector.

Youth Arts Impact Network priority areas will continue to be the following:

1. Strengthen relationships and connections among organizations across the Commonwealth.
2. Provide resources through a comprehensive website and pro bono office hours. The [YAIN website](#) enables youth arts and CYD organizations to gain immediate access to relevant and timely [resources](#), [frameworks](#), [reports](#), and [current opportunities](#), including community networking events.
3. Improve practices. Continue to support improved data gathering systems and resources for Creative Youth Development (CYD) organizations. In FY27, we will continue to work alongside YAIN and the [3C Data Alliance](#) to help CYD organizations and young people access and utilize their own data for storytelling, advocacy, employment, and enhanced leadership opportunities, as well as adding to the overall advancement for arts and culture in our state. The collaborative structure is organized by a Steering Committee, a National Advisory Council, and DreamYard, a Bronx-based CYD organization acting as the lead partner for the project.

Poetry Out Loud (POL): Again, this year, we will be contracting with the Huntington Theatre Company to implement the national Poetry Out Loud program on behalf of Mass Cultural Council here in Massachusetts.

POL is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation. The NEA fully funds this program with a specific dedicated grant of \$25,000, the same as FY26. The Huntington Theatre Company raises more than \$50,000 in additional funds to carry out the program, which has been one of the five largest programs in the country for the last twelve years and the largest in New England as well. We are proud to partner with the Huntington Theatre on this successful project.

Creative Experiences

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Sara Glidden, Lisa Simmons, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Amy Chu, Kalyn King, Allie Rosenthal
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 Creative Experiences

Summary

This memo presents the funding scenario for the FY27 cycle of Mass Cultural Council's Creative Experiences program. The FY27 Spending Plan calls for an allocation of \$3,442,500 to support organizations, schools, and creative businesses to fund festivals, projects, residencies, and other cultural activities in the arts, humanities, and sciences. These grants are meant to expand access to a wide range of cultural experiences for the Massachusetts public. This year, the Creative Experiences program will grant \$2,500 or \$5,000 to recommended grantees. After receiving a total of 1,730 grant applications, the program will seek to fund 738 grants.

Program Overview

The full [Creative Experiences Program Guidelines](#) are online, and a high-level summary follows:

Applicant Eligibility

Eligibility is intentionally broad and includes nonprofits, for-profits, schools, municipal entities, as well as unincorporated organizations and creative businesses applying with fiscal agents. Eligible fiscal agents, foreign LLCs and corporations must be registered to do business in Massachusetts. Ineligible entities include FY26 Operating Grants for Organizations, Cultural Investment Portfolio, Cultural District Investment, and Gaming Mitigation Fund grant recipients and FY27 Operating Grants for Organizations and Youthreach applicants that are approved and choose to accept the award.

Program Eligibility

Eligible programs include experiences that incorporate the arts, humanities, or sciences and contribute to the cultural vitality of Massachusetts by being publicly available or intentionally serving a segment of the general public, rather than benefiting a private individual or group. "Publicly available" means open to the general public through paid or free admission, while serving a portion of the public may include specific geographic communities, schools, cultural or tribal groups, or populations requiring accommodations such as K-12 students, seniors, incarcerated individuals, or people with disabilities.

The programmatic activity must occur at least 50% between July 1, 2026, and June 30, 2027, with a project budget of cash expenses equal to or exceeding the requested grant amount of either \$2,500 or \$5,000. All experiences must be accessible to people with disabilities, and take place in Massachusetts, or if virtual, the event must be primarily marketed to a Massachusetts-based audience. Activities cannot include inherently religious practices such as worship, instruction, or proselytization, nor can they support events for political candidates. Finally, the project must not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, age, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Funding Priorities

Grants of \$2,500 or \$5,000 will be awarded based on the number of eligible applicants, equitable distribution and the prioritization categories listed below.

- **Experiences/Activities** where the primary purpose is producing, presenting or facilitating an experience in the arts, humanities, or sciences.
- **Experiences/Activities** that hire and compensate Massachusetts artists, humanists and/or scientists.
- **Applicants** that have not received funding from Mass Cultural Council directly in the last three fiscal years, or that are applying to the Mass Cultural Council for the first time.
- **Applicants** that have received a cumulative total of \$5,000 or less in grant funding from Mass Cultural Council directly in the last three fiscal years.
- **Applicants/Experiences** providing access for low-income individuals and families.
- **Applicants** that are [BIPOC Centered Organizations](#) or BIPOC majority schools.
- **Experiences/Activities** in cities and towns that are below the state's median household income and below statewide educational attainment. This includes but is not limited to places designated as Gateway Cities. [A full list of these under-resourced communities is available.](#)

These funding priorities are intended to support the agency's advancement goals by centering the arts, humanities, and sciences, emphasizing the fair compensation of cultural workers, and applying a more nuanced equity and inclusion lens to applicants' past funding histories.

Equitable Distribution: Each county is awarded grants based on their proportion of applicants. Ties for the final awards within a county were broken by considering distribution based on the applicant's Official City.

FY27 Program

The FY27 grant cycle of the Creative Experiences program opened on March 3, 2026, with an application deadline of April 30, 2026. We received 1,730 applications for this cycle, an increase of almost 12% over last year.

Eligible applicants: Of the 1,581 eligible applications received:

- 730 (46%) of the organizations have not received funding from us in the last three years, including previously unsuccessful applicants and new applicants.
- An additional 614 (39%) of the organizations have only received a total of \$5,000 in grant funding in the last three fiscal years (FY26, FY25, FY24).
- 448 (28%) are from BIPOC-Centered organizations/BIPOC majority schools.
- 576 (36%) would fund programs taking place in a priority community.
- 1,346 (85%) applicants are participating in the Card to Culture program or providing activities/experiences that are free.

Of the 738 organizations recommended for funding:

- 494 (67%) of the organizations have not received funding from us in the last three years, including previously unsuccessful applicants and new applicants.
- An additional 146 (20%) of the organizations have only received a total of \$5,000 in grant funding in the last three fiscal years (FY26, FY25, FY24).
- 359 (49%) are from BIPOC-Centered organizations/BIPOC majority schools.
- 290 (39%) would fund programs taking place in a priority community.
- 684 (93%) applicants are participating in the Card to Culture program or providing activities/experiences that are free.
- 734 (99%) applicants have the primary purpose of creating, presenting, or providing services in the arts, humanities, or sciences.
- 715 (97%) applicants are hiring and compensating Massachusetts artists, humanists and/or scientists.

80% of eligible applications from BIPOC-Centered organizations or BIPOC-majority K-12 schools are recommended for funding.

68% of eligible applications from organizations that haven't received funding from us in the last three years are recommended for funding.

Recommended Grants

Of 1,730 applications, 149 are determined to be ineligible for funding. Of 738 applications recommended for funding, we recommend that 16 receive Holds. Organizations that do not resolve the reason for their hold by late Fall will have their grant reverted.

A list of the 738 proposed grantees is included in **Appendix H**.

To the extent that not all the \$3,442,500 set aside can be used in FY27, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

The program is jointly managed by Cheyenne Cohn-Postell from the Communities team, Kalyn King from the Organizations team, and Amy Chu, from the Artists & Youth team. Application reviewers included Jenifer Lawless, Sara Glidden, Lisa Simmons, Dan Blask, Amy Chu, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Timothea Pham, Kalyn King, Kelly Bennett, Summer Conforto, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong, Sommers Smith, Lauren Bjella, Lillian Lee, and Jay Paget.

UP Innovation Fund

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Charles Baldwin, Colin Baylor
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: FY27 UP Innovation Fund

Summary

The UP Innovation Fund is a financial award for the 93 organizations that obtained the status of UP Designation while applications for the UP Initiative were active, 2015-2022. The UP Innovation Fund enables these organizations to identify and enact "Access" that is foundational, sustainable, and aspirational. When applications for the UP Initiative were paused in 2023, there was a recalibration of the UP Innovation Fund as a 5-year grant access grant. For FY27, the 5th and final year of the original proposal, I am requesting an allocation of \$465,000 to provide the 93 UP Designated organizations with \$5,000 awards.

Background

Between 2015 and 2022, organizations applied annually to join a community of inclusive design practice, the UP Initiative (UP for Universal Participation). A badge of UP Designation could be earned by participating in peer learning cohorts, the Innovation Learning Network (ILN), or by providing evidence of inclusive, accessible practices. The UP Designation status entitled them to apply for the UP Award (\$10k unrestricted grant for achieving Accessibility excellence, determined by peers and panelists), the Innovation Fund (\$3k grant for accessible product/practice development), and the LEAD stipend (\$1k professional development grant for staff to attend the LEAD Conference). Funding was competitive and not all UP Organizations were able to receive funding through these opportunities.

In 2023 the Agency developed a comprehensive Disability Equity Plan that seeks to enhance the growth of organizational learning, advance relationships with Deaf and/or Disabled artists, and address the Agency's internal policies and practices. Also, the UP grant programs were merged into a single Innovation Fund, a grant that was proposed to be available to all UP Designated Organizations each year for the duration of their designation, a 5-year period. To determine the efficacy of this multi-year fund, recipients of the UP Innovation Fund were expected to meet distinct criteria, including the submission of a Self-Assessment in 2025 and an Access Plan in 2026.

Of the 96 original UP Designated organizations, due to closures and/or internal capacities, 93 organizations remain eligible for the Innovation Fund grant. The Agency has allowed all UP Organizations to maintain their original UP Designated status during this innovative funding period and has been collecting the cohort's access data to determine effective practices and accountability measures. Along

with recommendations from the Disability Advisory Committee, this data has contributed to the redesign of the steps toward “UP Designation”.

In FY27, the Arts Access Hub Access Certification courses will be made available to staff from UP Designated organizations. Monthly UP office hours will continue to provide education and support on legal obligations, technical assistance, and access plan implementation. UP Designated Organizations will be expected to reapply for the status following the new guidelines. Data from Innovation Fund grantee Annual Reports will be one strategy towards finalizing the new UP Designation rubric and measuring the impact of the Agency's 5-year investment. In FY28, applications for UP Designation will open for Mass Cultural Council grantees and applicants.

Recommendations

The FY27 UP Innovation Fund grants to the current UP Designated Organizations can be found in **Appendix I**.

To the extent that not all of the \$465,000 set aside for UP Organizations can be used in FY27, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs.

Equity, Inclusion, and Access Grants

To: Mass Cultural Council Program Committee
 From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Charles Baldwin
 Date: August 13, 2026
 Re: Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub

Overview

Mass Cultural Council is proud to have partnered with the Open Door Arts in the development of research, resources, training, and tools that have established a strong, data-informed, and disability-centered foundation for advancing accessibility across the Massachusetts arts and culture sector.

A partnership investment of **\$100,000** in FY27 would support the continued growth and expansion of our work, enabling Open Door Arts to provide coordinated support across the Hub, self-assessment, staff training, and sector-wide learning initiatives.

This partnership supports:

- alignment with community-informed research and established tools
- consistent and clear understanding and implementation of accessibility efforts across organizations
- efficient use of resources without duplicating efforts
- measurable progress toward accessibility excellence

Background

The Innovation and Learning Network (ILN) was a series of professional development workshops on Universal Design and accessibility practices run directly by Mass Cultural Council staff, collaborative partner organizations, and hired consultants. The ILN facilitated the development of a Community of Practice; examining and activating physical, digital, educational, and social systems. Originally, the learning cohort consisted of 5 to 6 in-person day-long sessions but became an online class during the pandemic. In FY21 and FY22, the ILN consisted of a series of webinars, meetings, evaluations, and website audits to steward the implementation of access plans for cultural organizations. Program activities were designed and delivered in partnership with the National Center for Accessible Media, the Institute for Human Centered Design, Partners for Youth with Disabilities, and Open Door Arts.

This learning opportunity was offered to 10 to 13 organizations a year, but the goal was to make this opportunity available more broadly to as many organizations as possible. In FY23, applications for the UP Initiative were paused, the UP Innovation Fund was redesigned, and the Agency developed the [d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan \(FY25-28\)](#).

In FY25, Mass Cultural Council's [d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan \(FY25-28\)](#) called for the agency to collaborate with a specialized vendor, other agencies and service orgs, on the deployment, revision, scaling and launch of the Mass Cultural Council's Universal/Inclusive Design learning program, called the Innovation and Learning Network (ILN), in order to reach hundreds of organizations and individuals in the creative sector using a universal design for learning framework and a dynamic mix of online delivery and small group/peer group discussion opportunities. An investment from the Mass Cultural Council helps launch the [Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub](#).

- Website containing comprehensive centralized information, resources, rosters and training related to accessibility for arts and culture organizations
- Informational content, introductory videos, resources
- Rosters of disabled artists, user/experts, access consultants, and service providers

In FY26, the [Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub](#) served as a centralized, publicly accessible, free resource designed to support organizations in understanding and implementing accessibility across all areas of practice. [The Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment](#) provided more than 450 Massachusetts organizations with a structured, accessible way to evaluate their current practices, identify gaps, and prioritize next steps.

- The Arts and Culture Legal Responsibilities Identification Tool
- The Arts and Culture Glossary
- The Arts and Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment
- Content and structure are aligned with the Self-Assessment

Partnership

Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub: The Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub serves as a centralized, publicly accessible resource designed to support organizations in understanding and implementing accessibility across all areas of practice. It reflects extensive research, expert input, and lived experience, and provides practical, actionable guidance for organizations at all stages of their accessibility journey. Mass Cultural Council's FY25 investment helped launch this resource.

FY27 Partnership Components:

- Continued free access for all
- Continued recognition of MCC as an active founding partner across all materials
- Up to two annual "From Intention to Action" training sessions open to all grantees

Self-Assessment and Accessibility Planning: [The Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment](#)

provides organizations with a structured, accessible way to evaluate their current practices, identify gaps, and prioritize next steps. Since launch, more than 450 Massachusetts organizations have completed the assessment, contributing to a growing body of data and demonstrating strong sector-wide interest in advancing accessibility. Mass Cultural Council's FY25 investment helped launch this resource.

FY27 Partnership Components:

- Continued free access to the self-assessment tool for all
- Continued integration of self-assessment as a core requirement for UP Designation
- Continued recognition of MCC as a founding partner
- Ongoing technical assistance and support provided by Open Door Arts
- Continued equity points for completion of the self-assessment
- Continued data collection from Massachusetts-based organizations and compilation of aggregate self-assessment data, including a high-level summary of statewide findings.
- Exploration of additional equity points/funding priorities for grantees.

Foundations of Cultural Access Training: The Foundations of Access online training provides a comprehensive introduction to accessibility in arts and culture organizations through two 90-minute asynchronous sessions. Designed for staff across roles and departments, the training explores disability history, culture, and justice, along with the policies, practices, and procedures that support meaningful access. Participants learn about physical spaces, access services, accessible communications, and program design, while gaining a deeper understanding of how these elements work together to create inclusive experiences. Mass Cultural Council's FY26 investment helped launch this resource.

FY27 Partnership Components:

- Foundations of Cultural Access training available to all MCC grantee organizations for the first 12 months after they are made available.

Cultural Access Practitioner Certification Course: The Cultural Access Practitioner Certification program is the first of its kind, designed to build a national workforce of trained professionals equipped to lead accessibility efforts within arts and culture organizations. In addition to strengthening individual knowledge, capacity, and expertise, the program establishes a shared foundation of training across participants. This consistency ensures that individuals across organizations are working from a common understanding of accessibility principles and practices. In turn, this leads to more consistent and reliable access experiences for people with disabilities across organizations and the sector.

By investing in training and certification, the Agency has the opportunity to lead nationally in developing a network of practitioners who can drive change across the sector. This approach increases access to high-quality, disability-centered learning, reduces redundancy in training efforts, and strengthens the overall standard of practice. Mass Cultural Council's FY26 investment helped launch this resource.

FY27 Partnership Components:

- Access for all current UP-designated organizations:
- One seat per UP organization in the Cultural Access Practitioner Certification program
- Co-facilitated cohort model for certification program UP participants, including six facilitated peer-learning sessions that support reflection, discussion, and a structured timeline for certification completion.

Thought Partnership & Collaboration: The continued partnership between Open Door Arts and Mass Cultural Council creates opportunities to align efforts, share expertise, and strengthen accessibility initiatives across the cultural sector. As UP Designation, accessibility planning, and professional development opportunities continue to evolve, regular collaboration will help ensure these efforts remain practical, impactful, and responsive to the needs of Massachusetts organizations. This partnership also creates opportunities for mutual learning, drawing on each organization's experience working directly with arts and cultural organizations to advance accessibility.

FY27 Partnership Components:

- ODA will provide feedback and consultation on the development of the accessibility rubric, UP designation criteria, implementation timeline, and related learning opportunities associated with UP Designation.
- Mass Cultural Council will provide feedback on trainings, practitioner certification, and other accessibility capacity-building initiatives.