



Power of culture

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

Minutes of the 170th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council Thursday, August 27, 2026

Online Meeting

Council Members Present:

- Ché Anderson, Chair
- Jo-Ann W. Davis, Vice-Chair
- Tom Bernard
- Vinny deMacedo
- Simone Early
- Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
- Donna Haghighat
- Cecil Barron Jensen
- Joyce Linehan
- Anika Lopes
- Diane Asadorian Masters
- Ellice Patterson
- Julie Wake

Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Present:

- David Slatery, Acting Executive Director
- Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
- Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
- Ann Petruccelli Moon, Acting Chief of Staff
- Erik Holmgren, Manager of Advancement & Strategic Partnerships
- Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager
- Kate McDougall, Controller
- Charles Baldwin, Program Officer for Access & Inclusion
- Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager
- Lillian Lee, Program Officer for Organizations
- Anitha Kanthaiah, Fiscal Contracts Officer
- Lisa Simmons, Program Manager, Community Initiative

Also Present:

- Maia Livramento, 3rd Eye Youth Empowerment

Chair Ché Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. and asked Acting Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to read the Open Meeting Law Statement. He then welcomed Council Members, staff, and guests to the meeting and introduced guest speaker Maia Livramento from 3rd Eye Youth Empowerment. Maia is a New Bedford-based artist, cultural organizer, and community advocate who uses creativity and hip-hop culture as tools for youth empowerment and community connection. She serves as a leader with 3rd Eye Youth Empowerment, a volunteer-driven organization that has been creating opportunities for young people to engage, unite, and activate through the arts since 1998. 3rd Eye was a first-time recipient of Mass Cultural Council's Operating Grants for Organizations last fiscal year, they are also a Card to Culture organization.

Maia gave a brief presentation on the work of 3rd Eye Youth Empowerment. The Chair then encouraged Council Members to ask questions.

Tom Bernard thanked Maia for her presentation and asked about the organization's network noting their strong coalition of community partners. Tom inquired as to how that network evolved over the years, and what opportunities Maia sees for the future.

Maia shared that 3rd Eye is part of the Barr Foundation's six-year cohort, and the Barr Foundation has been integral to their planning and sustainability. Their support has helped us think about a down payment, supplementing income, and building a stronger fundraising network. We've also been heavily involved with our mentor and coach through Barr who has connected us to an even broader network. Within the New Bedford community, 3rd Eye is looking at opportunities like subscription boxes and different membership tiers. So many people have come into the building to rent the space, and they are finding new ways to activate it. Maia added that the organization is thinking about all upcoming programming and how it can generate additional revenue while continuing to serve the community. That could include things like birthday parties, face painting, dancing, and other activities. They are also looking at ways to add affordable options onto building rentals so they can keep the space active and accessible within the community.

Jen Lawless mentioned that, through its Creative Youth Development work, Mass Cultural Council is part of a Youth Arts Impact Network and that she is happy to connect Maia to that network if she isn't already involved.

Ellice Patterson shared that she has been in 3rd Eye's space before and thinks it's great. It's been through decades of iterations in New Bedford. She encourages her fellow Council Members to visit and see it for themselves.

The Chair thanked Maia again for her participation and presentation at the meeting and for the important work she and the team are doing in New Bedford; he plans to visit the space in the future.

The Chair then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes from their last meeting and if they had he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Diane Asadorian Masters moved to approve the minutes. Julie Wake seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin, David Kong, Ashley Occhino, Emily Bramhall, Rhonda Anderson, and Allyce Najimy were absent, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: to approve the Minutes of the May 19, 2026 Council Meeting in the form presented.

Ché began his Chair's Report by thanking the Council for embracing him as Chair. He also thanked the cultural sector and expressed that he was enjoying attending meetings and events regularly and hoped to be invited to more this fall.

He then shared an update on the Executive Director search. He has created a Task Force comprised of Council Members; this may expand to include other Council Members and external partners as well. The Task Force has set early 2027 as the time by which they will work to have a new Executive Director onboard. They are searching for a consultant to handle the back-end work and operational needs so that work is not put on the Agency's staff.

A public survey will soon be opened to the sector and, in fact, the full Commonwealth to gather feedback and input on the search and identify qualities the sector would like to see in the next leader. Ché thanked the Task Force and the entire Council for their feedback thus far; as well as staff and partners for having conversations about the search. This is the only way we can make sure we do this right: take the information we have, gather additional input, and build support. Ché noted that there are those who wanted this to happen faster, he will not apologize for the pace explaining the Task Force is taking the appropriate amount of time and laying the foundation for this important work.

Finally, Ché shared that he is in Washington D.C. at a conference called PolicyLink with a variety of partners, including Mass Humanities and MassCreative, and about 2,000 other people. We are listening to ways we can enrich the nation. For the first time, there is an arts track, with folks from all over the U.S. Therefore, Ché will ask Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis to run the second half of the meeting so that he can attend the conference; promising to find ideas to bring back to the Council.

There were no questions for Ché, and he asked Acting Executive Director David Slatery for his report.

David began by noting that this is Mass Cultural Council's most important meeting of the year. It has been very busy, and we have been turning our attention inward to review the final state budget and build our FY27 spending plan. There is an old joke that working at a state arts agency is the best job one can have; but just to pay you back, July and August are your hardest months.

He then took a moment to thank the staff and said he could not be prouder of the individuals he works with.

He noted that Bethann Steiner would share a more detailed report, but Mass Cultural Council did well in the state budget through the Governor, House, Senate, and conference committee process. Dave and members of the staff team have been attending meetings and events across the Commonwealth focusing on the MassWINS Act, along with STEM Advisory Council meetings, and the STEAM subcommittee the Agency has formed. Dave was at Herman Melville's estate to participate in a public reading of *Moby Dick*; he also visited the Berkshire Museum and the Concord Museum.

He asked Kate McDougall, who, as Controller, oversees the Fiscal team, to introduce Anitha Kanthaiah, who had recently joined the staff. Kate introduced Anitha; she was previously a contract employee with the Agency and helped process pandemic recovery grants. Dave also noted that one of the Agency's longtime employees, Amy Chu, had left the Agency for a new opportunity in another state. Dave also took a moment to acknowledge Charles Baldwin's recent award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. It is an honor well bestowed. Mass Cultural Council knows Charles is wonderful, and we are glad the whole country now knows it, too.

There were no questions for Dave, so he moved on to provide an update on the Agency's Advancement work. The Advancement Committee met on August 21 and received a full and complete update. The Agency seeks to continue promoting the cultural sector as a place for solutions in the Commonwealth. The arts should be included in policy development and should be at the table for all important discussions. The Committee discussed \$45,000 in proposed advancement spending: \$10,000 for work focused on defining the creative economy, \$25,000 to begin work establishing a Creative Wealth Fund, and \$10,000 for a cross-sector convening.

Advancement Committee Chair Iván Espinoza-Madrigal thanked David and the staff team for their work. He noted that the Committee's votes are important for a host of reasons. They set a tone for what our future advocacy and community engagement can look like, particularly the exploratory fund, which creates an opportunity to assess the viability of a Creative Wealth Fund and determine whether it would benefit the arts and the creative mission we are trying to advance at the Agency. It also allows us to do this with an eye toward engaging and activating other sectors. There are some models for what we will study.

Tom Bernard, who is a member of the Advancement Committee, added that he wants to compliment the work that was done by the staff by making these three proposals to the Committee. They feel very thoughtful and measured. In some ways, this is new territory for investment, and there were good questions and discussion. We were well guided by the staff in the discussion. This is evolving work, and we are proving a concept. Kudos to the work that went into the proposals.

Julie Wake added that getting some substance around this concept of a Creative Wealth Fund will be useful to the sector. We think about this regionally, including on the Cape. Having something guided by the Agency that the sector will embrace and that provides some sort of framework to work around is valuable. Digging deep into this is important. It should not just be a great idea; we need a framework for how we do this work. Thank you to the staff.

Dave then stated that the last item on his portion of the agenda is the equity progress report. The Agency is continuing strong work in this area, including through the Disability Access Committee, Native & Indigenous Peoples Committee, and the Accessibility Hub. He added that as part of the Agency's work and outreach, grant celebrations are held in every county. This year the staff added a virtual celebration for the entire Commonwealth for everyone including those who could not physically attend an event as a direct result of our accessibility work.

Ché then asked Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis to run the remainder of the meeting.

Jo-Ann asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her report.

Bethann thanked Dave for teeing up some of Public Affairs' accomplishments which Council Members will see outlined fully in their meeting materials. She noted that the Legislature works on a two-year calendar session. Formal sessions adjourned on July 31. New rules and other items that have been put into Conference Committee for final negotiation can continue to be worked on and will end on January 5. There are 12 panels working right now.

One item the Agency is excited about is the economic development bond bill known as the MassWINs Act. We have several things we have proposed. Bethann then took a moment to say hello to friends, staff members, leaders and Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development Committee staff who were observing the meeting. She noted that it was a successful session. The Agency went in looking for budget spending support and policy, and we did well in all buckets. We are recipients of the highest level of funding in the Agency's history at \$28.1 million. Thank you to all on Beacon Hill who supported this.

There is also the capital spending plan, which supports the Cultural Facilities Fund with \$10 million. Governor Healey gave the Agency this, and therefore the FY27 grant round is supported. It was a successful session for arts and culture.

Shifting to Public Affairs, Bethann commended Dawn Heinen, Carmen Plazas, and Christian Kelly, who are working very hard as after this meeting the news of the spending plan will be announced, and the Agency's website will be fully updated with new grant programs and other news.

Jo-Ann thanked Bethann for her report and then asked David and Jen Lawless to give the FY27 spending plan presentation.

Dave and Jen moved on to the FY27 spending plan presentation. Jen shared her screen outlining the Agency's priorities and proposed spending for FY27. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Dave provided a big picture overview, and Jen provided more specifics about recommended grants and a program operations update. She acknowledged the immense work of the programs staff, with a lot going out in the next 24 hours. The day after approvals is one of the best days when announcements are made and applicants learn they have been funded. Staff also do a great job supporting and responding to applicants who receive bad news and pointing them toward other opportunities.

Jen then invited Julie Wake and Cecil Barron Jensen to speak about the recommendations made at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Cecil shared that Julie and the Committee held a great meeting. They heard from staff who gave clear presentations that made the grant recommendations easy for the Committee to understand. The side-by-side comparisons and percentages showing how funding is being distributed across the Commonwealth were especially helpful. It was a great meeting, and the Committee benefited from hearing directly from the team.

Jo-Ann then asked David to review the Conflicts of Interest list.

Dave reviewed conflicts of interest and reminded members that they cannot participate in official action where a conflict exists and explained what activities might constitute a conflict. He asked whether there were any amendments to the list and Ann noted that Iván and Anika had additions to their lists.

Jen then reviewed the FY27 grant and program recommendations. The Programs Committee has reviewed the recommendations in greater depth. Jen ran through the list on the agenda and the associated dollar amounts, including legislative earmarks in the appendix, unrestricted operating support for organizations, and cultural districts.

Dave concluded the presentation by telling the Council that the staff had prepared a strong, equitable spending plan, detailed in the memo. He asked if there were any questions from the Council about the plan and there were none.

Jo-Ann asked for a motion and a second to approve the FY27 spending plan and grant recommendations. Tom moved to approve the recommendations; Joyce Linehan seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that Ché Anderson, Rhonda Anderson, Ashley Occhino, Emily Bramhall, David Kong, Petrina Martin, and Allyce Najimy were absent, Council Members unanimously voted to approve the following:

WHEREAS the General Court of the Massachusetts State Legislature has appropriated, and 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 Mass Cultural Council staff has presented a draft FY27 budget and spending plan to the Executive Committee at its meeting on August 13, 2026 (the "Plan");

WHEREAS the Executive Committee reviewed the Plan and recommended that it be forwarded to the Council for approval; and

WHEREAS Council staff presented the Plan to the Mass Cultural Council at its meeting on August 27, 2026 (the "Council Meeting"); 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"),

WHEREAS based on such Plan, Council staff has recommended FY27 Advancement Spending to the Advancement Committee at its meeting on August 21, 2026 ("Advancement Committee Meeting"),

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

RESOLVED: To approve the Plan as recommended by the Executive Committee and presented to the Council Meeting subject to the further approvals of the individual grant and program recommendations below; and

WHEREAS Council staff presented the FY27 grants recommendations to the Programs Committee at its meeting on August 13, 2026 ("Programs Committee Meeting");

WHEREAS the Programs Committee recommended to the full Council the allocation of the grants and approval of the programs presented at the Programs Committee Meeting;

WHEREAS the Programs Committee reviewed procedures of grant allocations and recommended that the Council approve the same;

NOW THEREFORE, it is hereby

Section 10(a) Mass Humanities

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

Section 10(b) New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA)

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

Section 10(c) MASSCreative

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to MASSCreative for \$30,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 10(d) Massachusetts Poet Laureate

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to Regie Gibson, the Massachusetts Poet Laureate, for \$25,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 10(e) Legislative Mandates

RESOLVED: To approve funding of the \$758,000 of legislative earmarks as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 11(a) Unrestricted Operating Support for Organizations

RESOLVED: To endorse the approach by staff to provide \$7,350,000 in unrestricted operating support grants to cultural organizations under both the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and Operating Grants for Organizations as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 12(a) Cultural District Investment Grants

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

Section 12(b) Local Cultural Councils

RESOLVED: To make allocations to the Local Cultural Councils totaling \$5,850,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 12(c) Tribal Cultural Councils

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$71,200 allocation to Tribal Cultural Councils as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 13(a) YouthReach

RESOLVED: To approve grant allocations to the YouthReach program in the amount of \$1,950,000, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 13(b) Creative Youth Development and Education Grants

RESOLVED: To approve 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 recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 14(a) Creative Experiences

RESOLVED: To approve the Creative Experiences program grants totaling \$3,442,500 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

Section 14(b) UP Innovation Fund Grants

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

Section 14(c) Equity, Inclusion, and Access Grants

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

General RESOLVED: To approve the ability of staff to re-allocate unused grant funds for any program to any other FY27 approved grant program (whether approved at this meeting or a future FY27 Council meeting) as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

The following Committee Members abstained from voting and/or discussing grants pertaining to the organizations listed under their name:

1. Ché Anderson
 - a. City of Worcester
 - b. College of the Holy Cross

- c. EcoTarium
 - d. Institute of Contemporary Art
 - e. Museum of Worcester
 - f. New Balance / New Balance Foundation
 - g. New Commonwealth Fund
 - h. Rose Kennedy Greenway
 - i. The Hanover Theatre
 - j. The Quin House
 - k. UMass Chan Medical School
 - l. Worcester Art Museum
 - m. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
 - n. Worcester Historical Museum
 - o. Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce
- 2. Rhonda Anderson**
- a. Mass Humanities
 - b. New England Foundation for the Arts
 - c. Ohketeau Cultural Center
- 3. Thomas Bernard**
- a. Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
- 4. Jo-Ann Davis**
- a. MASSCreative
 - b. Springfield Museums
 - c. The Care Center
- 5. 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
- 6. Iván Espinoza-Madrigal**
- a. Institute of Contemporary Art
 - b. New England Foundation for the Arts

- c. Lawyers for Human Rights
- 7. Donna Haghghat**
 - a. WAM Theater
- 8. Cecil Barron Jensen**
 - a. Artists Association of Nantucket
 - b. Egan Maritime Institute
 - c. Nantucket Cultural District
- 9. Joyce Linehan**
 - a. Culture Saves
 - b. Friends of Cedar Grove Cemetery
 - c. Fuller Craft Museum
 - d. Massachusetts College of Art & Design
 - e. Shout Syndicate
 - f. Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts
- 10. Anika Lopes**
 - a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation
 - b. Amherst Business Improvement District
- 11. Ashley Occhino**
 - a. Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition/One South Coast Chamber Foundation
 - b. South Coast Community Foundation
 - c. Southeastern Massachusetts Visitors Bureau
 - d. Textile Society of America
- 12. Ellice Patterson**
 - a. Abilities Dance
- 13. Julie Wake**
 - a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod
 - b. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute

Jo-Ann thanked her fellow Council members, noting that they are a remarkable group of people devoting so much time and attention. She then thanked the staff; expressing appreciation for Ann, who managed the logistics of the meeting and congratulations to Charles on his award. She adjourned the meeting at 11:36 a.m.