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Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee Meeting

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

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Agenda
Mass Cultural Council
Programs Committee Meeting
Tuesday, October 20, 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](#)
"October 20, 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 Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee Meeting – August 13, 2026
- 3. Co-Chairs' Report**
- 4. Executive Director's Report**
- 5. Conflict of Interest Notifications**
- 6. Programs Update and Grant Recommendations**
 - 6a. Universal Participation (UP) Update & presentation
 - 6b. FY27 Social Prescription, Arts & Health Grant Recommendations **Vote**
- 7. Adjourn**

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, October 20, 2026

(In advance of the 171st Meeting of Mass Cultural Council on October 29, 2026)

Section 2:

RESOLVED: To approve the Minutes of the Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee Meeting dated August 13, 2026, in the form presented.

Sections 6(b)

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the Social Prescription: NEA Arts & Health Grants in the amount of \$50,001 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.



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

**Minutes
Mass Cultural Council
Programs Committee Meeting
Thursday, August 13, 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, Chief of Staff
- Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
- Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
- Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager
- Dan Blask, Program Manager
- Lisa Simmons, Program Manager
- Kortney Adams, Program Officer
- Colin Baylor, Grants Management System Officer
- Allie Rosenthal, Grants Management System Officer
- Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, 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 Julie Wake called the meeting to order at 1:02pm and asked Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to read the Open Meeting Law statement. Julie then asked if Committee members had reviewed the minutes from their last meeting held on June 17, 2026. If they had, she would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Donna Haghighat moved to approve the minutes; Co-Chair Cecil Barron Jensen seconded the motion. By roll call vote, it was unanimously

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

Julie welcomed Committee Members and staff to the meeting and said it was an exciting time, as we are in the first quarter of a brand-new fiscal year. She explained that the Committee was there to hear the plans created by staff for FY27 and emphasized the importance of supporting them, asking questions, and providing feedback. She hoped for a robust conversation and noted the Agency is incredibly fortunate to have a slightly larger budget this year. The Committee is eager to hear what the staff is planning and proposing. With that, she turned it over to Acting Executive Director Dave Slatery and Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless.

Before beginning the presentation, Dave shared that the Executive Committee had met that morning and voted to recommend the spending plan that the grants that will be presented this afternoon are based on. He dispensed with a long Executive Director's report and moved directly to the grant and program recommendations. Jen shared her screen and walked the Committee through a PowerPoint presentation on FY27 grant and program recommendations (a copy of which is available upon request). She began with a high-level overview of the grant program lines in the spending plan and explained that the Committee would also hear from program staff who would introduce the memos included in the meeting materials. Then, there would be an opportunity for questions and discussion.

At the conclusion of Jen's presentation, Ashley Occhino asked a question about the Gaming Mitigation Fund, whether the fund applies only to physical casinos or also to online gaming.

It was clarified that it applies specifically to the two resort-style casinos in Massachusetts (in Everett and Springfield): 2% of the Commonwealth taxes from the two casinos are put in a special fund benefitting the Agency's programs. Dave explained that this meant for every \$2 spent at a casino, the Agency receives a penny.

Bethann added that all of this is set out in statute in the gaming law, which specifies where different pieces of gaming revenue need to go. There are

various recipients who receive different percentages, all of which are established in statute.

Jen added that the fund came about because a group of performing arts centers came together and recognized that casinos were able to pay more and charge less for touring artists, putting arts centers at a disadvantage. They advocated to the legislature to secure mitigation funding to compensate for competing for the same talent pool and the same audience.

Dave added that this was all part of the law when it was passed in 2011. The Agency first received money in 2020, describing the approach as very forward-thinking. The Agency has received between \$4.5 million and \$5.5 million per year over the past six years.

Julie was excited to see that the number of Gaming grants would increase in FY27. She also referenced the formula that had been mentioned and asked whether there was a simple way to describe what the formula is when staff refer to it. Lillian Lee stated she would address that.

Julie then asked Dave to review the Conflicts of Interest list. Dave explained that under state ethics law Council Members may not take official action pertaining to any organization in which they have a financial interest, employment, or board membership; rather than leaving the room for the vote on grant recommendations, their conflicts of interest are disclosed on a list, and they state that they abstain from discussing or voting on any organization which is disclosed as a conflict on the list. He asked Committee Members to review conflicts of interest list in their materials and indicate if there were any updates. There were none.

Julie then asked Jen and the staff team to present the grant and program recommendations.

Jen began with Partnership Grants and noted that Mass Humanities' funding is increasing because of the increase in the Agency's appropriation. Lillian Lee summarized Operating Support grant programs. Lisa Simmons summarized Communities grants – Local Cultural Councils, Tribal Cultural Councils, and Cultural Districts. Kortney Adams presented on YouthReach and Education Grants.

Julie asked if, when staff describe a grant duration as two years and then four years, whether that means the listed amount is the total amount for the full grant period or whether it is divided over two or four years.

It was clarified that the amount is per year, contingent on the organization completing its final report. Jen added that the grant amount in future years could change based upon the state budget and on the spending plan approved by the Council. The recommendation does not mean an organization will receive that exact dollar amount; the amount depends on each year's allocation, the spending plan, and Council approval.

Julie expressed enthusiasm for multiyear grants because it means organizations can plan, especially when working with youth.

Jen then explained that staff has been continuously consolidating programs. They had extended the YouthReach redesign process over a three-year period and were excited to relaunch it.

Kalyn King then presented on the Creative Experiences program.

Ashley asked Kalyn to reiterate how geography was considered. Kalyn explained that it is like what the staff has done for other programs: the percentage of applications coming from a county is matched as closely as possible with the percentage of grants recommended for each county.

Jen added that in prior years the process had been a little less formal, but this year they formalized it. In essence, they have a ranked list by county. The number of grants and the rank ranges differ by county, so there is not one giant list. Instead, they go down each county's list.

Cecil said that this is how they report on their grants and how they see them in the final reports at the end of the year. They get to see the number of applications and grants given align by county. She said it makes a great deal of sense and appreciated the diligence. When committee members go into their communities, all they need to say is, "Apply." The more applications there are, the more funding can be directed to a community.

Julie then asked about funding priorities for for-profit organizations and how they are reviewed.

Kalyn explained that staff first make sure the organizations are current with all their reporting to the state. After that, the rest of the funding prioritization categories are the same across both categories. They look at organizations that are BIPOC-centered, organizations participating in Card to Culture, organizations offering a free-to-the-public program, and funding history with the Mass Cultural Council.

Jen added that the funding priorities are applied to all organizations in the same way.

Julie asked a second question, noting that schools had been invited and asking whether this was the first year.

Kalyn explained that the Festivals and Projects program and STARS program had previously merged, and the Creative Projects for Schools program was included this year.

Julie said that the priority is similar but does not involve revenue or Card to Culture and asked how schools navigated through the process.

Kalyn explained that Creative Projects for Schools had funding priorities that mirrored the other Projects program. Schools self-identify as BIPOC-centered, and enrollment statistics are considered, including schools with a 50% or greater BIPOC student population. School programs are often, but not always, free to participants, so that is also evaluated.

Julie said she understood and appreciated the BIPOC priority but asked whether there was also a way to complement that with income.

Kalyn said yes. Another funding prioritization considers projects happening in, or schools located in, cities and towns that are underserved. The designation takes income and educational attainment into account, and there is a boost for any organization or school in those cities or towns.

Jen added that the question around schools was one of the things they had been thinking about. One issue they had to define was what “BIPOC” means. For schools, the team uses Dept. Of Elementary and Secondary Education data, which is rich and varied and includes information such as language spoken at home and disability status. When bringing these programs together, including free offerings and Card to Culture participation, the question is how to make sure funding priorities resonate with both schools and organizations. She said the breadth of eligibility is both a blessing and a curse of the program, and that these were questions the team had asked itself as well.

Julie asked another question about school systems' support of arts education and arts extracurriculars. She said they see this in her day-to-day work and that her review committee is surprised by how many schools are applying. There are a lot of questions about why schools do not have a line item for arts. She asked whether the Programs Committee has seen progress in this area and whether there is anything the sector can do.

The team discussed how there are different levels of investment across cities and towns. Each school has a report card, and there could be an entire meeting devoted to that measure. The challenge is that different districts are encountering different circumstances.

Cecil said that it is a lot to merge and thanked the team for everything they are doing.

Bethann made a policy connection after the ballot question that eliminated MCAS. The Governor created a K–12 working group, which the Agency was a part of. One recommendation from that group is an arts requirement for high school graduation. Even if not every school is budgeting for every opportunity, and even if every application cannot be funded, the Agency was part of that policy conversation.

Jen then reviewed the last memos covering the UP initiative and access grants.

Program Officer for Access & Inclusion Charles Baldwin was not present because he was being recognized for his work nationally at the LEAD Conference in Washington, DC. Public Relations Manager Christian Kelly had written a beautiful article for the Agency's blog about this national recognition for Charles, and Jen shared the post with the Committee.

Jen then reviewed the UP grant recommendations, about which there were no questions.

That concluded the grant and program recommendations presentation.

Julie asked for a motion to approve all recommendations and bring them forward to the full Council at its meeting on August 27. Cecil moved to approve the recommendations; Emily Bramhall seconded the motion. By roll call vote, Committee Members unanimously voted to approve the following:

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 the 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. Page 2 of 3

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.

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 or 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. Jo-Ann Davis
 - a. MASSCreative
 - b. Springfield Museums
 - c. The Care Center
 - 3. Donna Haghighat
 - a. WAM Theater
 - 4. Cecil Barron Jensen
 - a. Artists Association of Nantucket
 - b. Egan Maritime Institute
 - c. Nantucket Cultural District
 - 5. 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
 - 6. Julie Wake
 - a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod
 - b. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute

Julie congratulated the incredible team and said there were about to be a lot of happy people across the Commonwealth. She thanked Jen and the team, noting that this is a lot of work. She said she appreciated the team's knowledgeable, kind approach to the work and is grateful to be part of it.

She thanked the Committee for its questions and intentionality and adjourned the meeting at 2:08.

Executive Director's Report

Programs Committee
October 2026

Activities Report

Earlier this month, Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon shared the October Executive Department update, which detailed recent activities.

Conferences & Engagements

As noted in the August Council meeting materials, Dave Slatery and several staff members attended the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) gathering in Washington, DC, October 7-9. Chair Ché Anderson was elected to the NASAA Board. A summary will be provided at the Council Meeting. One of the key takeaways from the conference was the belief that arts & health initiatives (such as the ones being presented to this meeting) are being perceived as the next major programmatic initiative in the world of state arts agencies. Once again, Mass Cultural Council, with its March 2020 launch of the then-named Culture Rx featuring social prescribing, was a pioneer in a key policy area.

Staff Updates

As Committee members are aware, our former Senior Director of Business Operations, Cathy Cheng-Anderson, departed the Agency over the summer. This has necessitated a reworking of staff roles and how we do business.

Earlier this month, I expanded the composition of the Senior Staff at the Agency to include Ann Petruccelli Moon as Chief of Staff and a full-fledged member of the group (previously, her position was a support role). Ann will directly oversee the Agency's people operations functions (HR, office operations, and records management). She will continue to be your

primary contact and manage executive affairs. Also, recognizing how very important the advancement and strategic partnerships work has been in the past year and how key it will be to the future to the Agency's business, I have added Erik Holmgren as the Senior Director, Strategy & Partnerships, a full and co-equal member of the group.

Jen Lawless's role will be expanded to the Deputy Director role, in which she will oversee our Finance Department, which will be directly run by our Controller, Kate MacDougall. Bethann Steiner will continue her crucial work as Deputy Director, Policy & Public Affairs.

In addition, we have adjusted the titles and salaries of certain staff to better reflect the roles and responsibilities people have been carrying out. This also has helped to distribute many of my duties and roles in advance of my planned retirement later next year. These adjustments were crafted to put the Agency on a stronger foundation for the future and to assure that the next executive director will come into a smooth-running organization with an efficiently organized team.

All of the matters I have discussed above are within the FY27 Spending Plan approved at the August Council meeting. The Agency is scheduled to undertake a salary review in FY28.

Executive Director Engagements

Recently Completed Engagements

- STEAM Subcommittee Meeting – September 8, 10am, virtual
- “Courage Can Save Us” with Senator Mark Kelly – September 8, 6pm, JFK Library & Museum
- Speaking Engagement: Boston University Arts Administration graduate course – September 9, 6pm at BU
- The Latino Equity Fund's annual celebration ¡Pa'lante! – September 10, 6pm, Termeer Square, Cambridge
- Panelist at The Creative Economy as Common Ground – Philanthropy MA presentation -September 14
- Jess Dugan: Love Pictures exhibition opening reception – September 15, 5pm, MassArt
- Newton Cultural Council Grantee Celebration – September 17, 5pm, Newton City Hall

- Creative Labor: Boston Cultural Policy Summit – September 18, noon, Boston Public Library
- STEM Advisory Council Meeting – September 18, 1pm, Mass Maritime Academy
- Tour of The Company Theater with Senator Pat O'Connor – September 21, 11am, Norwell
- Shah Family Foundation Roundtable Discussion with MFA Boston Director Pierre Terjanian – September 22, 5pm, Boston
- AIM Annual Economic Outlook – September 24, 9am, Boston
- North End Music & Performing Arts Center Annual Event – September 24, 5pm, The North End, Boston
- Designing for Belonging: A Massachusetts Summit on Connection & Community – September 25, 10am, UMass Boston
- Philanthropy Massachusetts' 57th Annual Conference – September 29, 8am, Big Night Live in Boston
- Assembly 2026, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies – October 7-9, Washington D.C.
- MassHumanities Storyteller Awards – October 15, 6pm, Mill 1 in Holyoke

Upcoming Engagements

Please let Ann know if you'd like more information or if you are interested in joining any of these upcoming engagements.

- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE's) Celebrate the Arts Conference – October 27, location TBD
- Mass Book Awards, October 28, Massachusetts State House
- Mass Art's Creative Entrepreneurship Conference- November 7

Conflict of Interest Notifications

Mass Cultural Council Members

Updated August 28, 2026

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) **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) **Iván Espinoza-Madrigal**
 - a. Institute of Contemporary Art
 - b. New England Foundation for the Arts
 - c. Lawyers for Human Rights
- 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. 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

13) Anika Lopes

- a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation
- b. Amherst Business Improvement District

14) Petrina Martin

15) Diane Asadorian Masters

16) Allyce J. Najimy

17) Foundation to be Named Later

18) 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

19) Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

20) Julie Wake

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

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}

FY27 Programs Update and Recommendations

October 2026

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Colin Baylor, Allie Rosenthal
Date: October 20, 2026
Re: FY27 Programs Update and Recommendations

Overview

As you may recall, we paused the [Universal Participation \(UP\) Initiative](#) and are reviewing it as part of our programmatic work. You will find a memo below with an update on the program's reopening in FY27. Similarly to Cultural Districts, current UP Designated Organizations will have the opportunity to get designated first before the program is opened to all organizations in FY28.

Also, in these materials you will find funding recommendations for our FY27 Social Prescription program, which is funded through an Arts & Health grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

You will also receive updates from all programs in the council meeting materials, but we wanted to provide the committee with more detail on UP this month.

Universal Participation (UP) Update

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Charles Baldwin
Date: October 20, 2026
Re: UP Designation

Background

Mass Cultural Council's Universal Participation (UP) Initiative was established in 2015 to advance access at cultural facilities throughout the Commonwealth. The UP Initiative takes as a basic tenet that increasing accessibility for people with disabilities increases accessibility for everyone.

The Agency paused the Innovation and Learning Network in FY22 to evaluate the efficacy of the program and develop pathways for growth. We supported the Open Door Arts survey of institutional perceptions of access and the publication of the [Towards a Culture of Access Report 1](#). Working with consultants from [Art-Reach](#) and Open Door Arts, we supported the publication of [Towards a Culture of Access II](#), which presents findings on the cultural sector's accessibility from the perspective of people with disabilities.

In response to these reports, Mass Cultural Council embarked on the development of a [Disability Equity Plan](#) that looked to increase accessibility across our cultural sector and throughout our Agency's systems. The plan launched in 2025 and included recommendations to develop communities of practice, share resources, provide ongoing education, establish policies for plans and improvements, and create a [Disability Advisory Committee](#). The Disability Advisory Committee met for 2 years to review program data, discuss agency practices, and provide guidance on both the Equity plan and the future of the UP Initiative.

The New UP Initiative

At its core, UP is still aspirational and celebratory - the intent is to enhance cultural experiences for everyone, build capacity, fuel insight, and inspire action. Using the directives of Universal Design as guiding principles, the UP Initiative still looks to four distinct characteristics that build the foundation for "access" work:

- Equity: A vision of inclusion is baked into the systems of governance.
- Education: Provisions are available for staff training about inclusive culture.
- Representation: The institution centers marginalized voices to inform strategies.

- Innovation: Your institution supports a culture of risk taking.

However, based on the years of review, learning, partnership, and dialogue, we are proposing several changes to UP as we reopen the program in FY27 for the current UP Designated organizations:

1. **Promote the Arts Access Hub as the centralized resource for information, guidance, and educational content.** The culture of access reports identified that resources and information for cultural workers were scattered and difficult to find, or confusing to decipher. Organizations often relied upon a staff champion for guidance, and that information was lost when the champion moved on to new employment. Additionally, organizations were looking to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and seek affordable substantive assessment. The Arts Access Hub that Open Door Arts developed with funding and support from the Agency fills this gap. Organizations now have open access to a rich library of information, including a glossary of terms, an ADA ID tool, the Self-Assessment survey, Access and Transition Plan templates, and several experts.
2. **Expand the availability and reach of the learning opportunities available to the cultural sector.** Previously, we accepted 10 to 15 applications for the Innovation and Learning Network, a peer cohort that provided in-depth learning opportunities for cultural organizations seeking to improve access. In FY27, the Arts Access Hub provides learning opportunities to an almost unlimited number of organizations. A Foundations of Access course will be made available to cultural workers across the state as either individual asynchronous learning or as facilitated learning cohorts, and a Cultural Practitioner Certification course will be made available to the current 92 organizations with UP Designation. Mass Cultural Council has been a founding partner in the creation of these trainings.
3. **Strengthen the UP Designation to build trust and ensure organizations have policies and practices in place to effectively welcome people with disabilities.** The Universal Participation Initiative recognizes that accessibility is and should be a work in progress. Access is about process, not perfection. People with disabilities want to know they are welcome and they belong. Organizations need to know where and how they can improve. In response, we have developed an Access Rubric that outlines 16 key areas of access and defines a spectrum of progress from "Hasn't started" to "Advanced." This rubric will be the foundation for UP Designation going forward.

UP in FY27

Below is an outline of the plan for rolling out the new UP Designation process in FY27. A key element of this first year is working closely with our current 92 UP Designated organizations and learning from them directly about the updated criteria before applications open to new organizations in FY28. The plan for FY27 includes:

- Share UP Designation criteria with UP Organizations in late October.
- Offer UP organizations access to a free Cultural Practitioner Certification Course.
- Design the Access Office Hours to align and reinforce the certification content.
- Provide free access to the Foundations of Access course for organizational staff to attend as either a facilitated cohort offered by Mass Cultural Council, or as an asynchronous learning team on dates of their choosing.
- Reopen the UP Designation application to the current UP organizations in the spring. Applicants will provide levels of information and evidence in the 16 categories to determine if they are eligible to receive the badge of UP Designation in FY28.

Access Learning Opportunities for all grantees in FY27

Through our investment in the Arts Access Hub, all Mass Cultural Council grantees will have free, limited-time access to the Foundations of Access course. We have coordinated this offer with Open Door Arts, and the training will become available in the new year.

FY27 Social Prescription, Arts & Health Grant Recommendations

To: Mass Cultural Council Programs Committee
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Käthe Swaback
Date: October 20, 2026
Re: FY27 Social Prescription, Arts & Health Grant Recommendation

Summary

In FY26, we supported three Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) that partnered with [SocialRx](#) (formerly Art Pharmacy) to provide arts prescription services to their patients. This work was funded by a \$75,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). You can read more about how [social prescription helped change health outcomes at these community health centers](#) on the agency blog. This year, the NEA offered State Arts Agencies the opportunity to apply for \$50,000 to support Arts and Health projects. These funds were offered in addition to the standard state partnership grants the NEA makes each year. In FY27, Mass Cultural Council applied for, and received, \$50,000 to continue our social prescription work with community health centers.

The agency decided to continue to pursue our investment in FQHCs, specifically those that are members of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers. One of the long-term goals of the arts prescription program is to integrate this work into the existing MassHealth care offerings as an effective, cost-effective solution for mental health and social isolation challenges, among others. By continuing to work with community health centers through this grant, our goal is to build relationships, stories, long-term strategies, and data while continuing to dialogue with our partners across state government about the long-term inclusion of the practice in our public health care system. The FY26 application was carried forward so FY26 grantees could update it for FY27, including an additional question and goal related to capacity building for long-term, non-philanthropic support for arts prescriptions.

Recommendations

We received a total of three applications that met the eligibility criteria and wished to continue their FY26 work with [SocialRx](#) throughout FY27. Staff scored the applications internally and recommend awarding **\$50,001** evenly across all three FQHCs to support their continued implementation of social prescriptions. Based on the applications, we anticipate the three health centers will write more than 200 prescriptions by the end of the fiscal year and identify sustainable funding solutions to ensure arts prescribing continues beyond this grant. The recommended organizations include:

- NeighborHealth Corporation (East Boston), \$16,667
- Family Health Center of Worcester, Inc. (Worcester), \$16,667
- Fenway Community Health Center, Inc. (Boston), \$16,667

The Programs Committee recommended these grants for approval by Council. Should any of the recipients decline the award, we seek authorization to distribute the funds to the other health centers up to their proposed budget amount.