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Council Meeting Book

One Hundred and Seventy-First Meeting of Mass Cultural Council

Thursday, October 29, 2026

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Agenda
One Hundred Seventy-First Meeting
of Mass Cultural Council
Thursday, October 29, 2026

Noon – 3:00 p.m.

In-Person Meeting

Concord Museum
53 Cambridge Turnpike
Concord, MA 01742

Meeting materials will be posted online under
[Governing Council Meeting Schedule](#)
"October 29, 2026, Council Meeting"
On Mass Cultural Council's website.
<https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/board/>

Agenda Items

- 1. Call to Order – Open Meeting Law Notice**
- 2. Welcome: Concord Museum**
- 3. Minutes** **Vote**
 - 3a. Minutes of the 170th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council – August 27, 2026
- 4. Chair's Report**
 - 4a. Update: Executive Director Search
- 5. Executive Director's Report**

6. Legislative and Public Affairs Report

6a. Legislative Update

6b. Department Updates

7. Programs and Finance Report

7a. Department Updates

7b. Programs Committee Report

7c. Finance Update

7d. Out-of-State Travel Update

8. Conflict of Interest Notifications

9. FY27 Social Prescription, Arts & Health Grant Recommendations **Vote**

10. Advancement Report

10a. **Creative Wealth Fund** – Presentation and Discussion

11. Adjourn

Open Meeting Law Statement

(In-Person)

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Resolutions

Mass Cultural Council
Thursday, October 29, 2026

Section 2a:

RESOLVED: To approve the Minutes of the 170th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council dated August 27, 2026, in the form presented.

Section 9

RESOLVED: To approve the Social Prescription: NEA Arts & Health Grants in the amount of \$50,001 as recommended by the Programs Committee on October 20, 2026, and presented at the Council Meeting.

General

RESOLVED: To approve the ability of staff to redistribute the Social Prescription: NEA Arts & Health funds to the other health centers up to their proposed budget amount, should any of the recipients decline the award.



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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 Haghighat**
 - 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.

Executive Director's Report

Mass Cultural Council
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.

Governing Council Committee Updates

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met on October 15, had an update on the Executive Director search process, heard updates from the senior staff, and voted to approve the agenda for today's Council Meeting.

Programs Committee

The Programs Committee met on October 20, listened to and discussed a presentation on the Universal Participation (UP) program and voted to recommend the FY27 Social Prescription, Arts & Health Grant Recommendations to the full Council for approval.

As always, all Committee meeting materials and minutes are posted and available online at [Governing Council – Mass Cultural Council](#).

Staff Updates

As members may be 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 it has become a growing part of and truly a pillar of 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 has expanded to Deputy Director of the Agency, in which she will also 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 reset also helped to distribute many of my duties and roles in advance of my planned retirement later next year. These adjustments were put in place to provide a strong 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, Big Night Live in Boston
- Assembly 2026, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies – October 7-9, Washington D.C.
- Mass Humanities Storyteller Awards – October 15, at Mill 1 in Holyoke
- STEM Week Kickoff- October 19, Museum of Science in Boston
- Cape & Islands Community Initiative Convening-October 21 at the 204 Cultural Arts Building in Harwich.

- Masary Studios: Eco-Rhythms event- October 22 at Midway Artist Studios, Fort Point, Boston.
- Screening: *Women Laughing: Women Cartoonists of The New Yorker*- October 27 at Mass Art.
- 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

Conflict of Interest Notifications

A reminder to all Council Members to report all potential conflicts of interest and connections with any cultural organizations or potential grantees- see item 9 in the Council materials. Doing so ensures that the Agency's minutes and records can appropriately reflect that members are recused from any discussion or vote on grants or other Agency arrangements with which a member has a possible conflict. For further information, please contact Dave. A copy of the most recent conflict list is contained in the Council Meeting materials.

Equity Progress Report

October 2026

Equity Plan Implementation

Native American and Indigenous People's Advisory Committee

We are preparing to convene the advisory committee for the second year of its two-year commitment. The advisory committee will continue to advise us on the implementation of the equity plan and will focus on policies and practices across programs. In addition to the advisory committee, we are creating an Intertribal Cultural Council Task Force this year. We are creating the task force as part of the equity plan and as an extension of our work with the Tribal Cultural Councils.

Intertribal Cultural Council Task Force

In FY23, our original Tribal Task Force identified 6 potential Tribal Cultural Councils (TCCs). We have worked with the Tribes in Massachusetts, and four TCCs have been established. We are still working on creating two additional TCCs: the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohicans and an Intertribal Cultural Council. We have had several introductory conversations with members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band and hope to continue connecting and working toward an ongoing relationship.

To ensure the Tribal Cultural Council program is broadly inclusive of Native American and Indigenous Peoples, Mass Cultural Council is assembling an Intertribal Cultural Council Task Force to create recommendations that will guide the establishment of an Intertribal Cultural Council as the fifth Tribal Cultural Council to join the program. Mass Cultural Council seeks Indigenous and Native American leaders with close ties to the Commonwealth with experience in the arts and cultural sector that are not

currently represented by the existing four Tribal Cultural Councils. We will provide updates as this work progresses.

Sector Education, Services & Achievement

Through our partnership with Open Door Arts and our investment in the [Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub](#), the field will have access to two exciting new training opportunities: Foundations of Cultural Access and a Cultural Access Practitioner Certification. Descriptions of these are included below.

Foundations of Cultural Access

Build a shared foundation in disability, accessibility, and cultural participation. This introductory training connects essential concepts to practical ways of improving access across organizational mindsets and practices, spaces, services, communications, and programs.

- **Who this is for:** Staff and leadership of cultural organizations.
- **Format and time:** There are two options for participation:
 - Live virtual: Two sessions (2 hours each, including Q&A) - choose between:
 - January 13 and 20, 10:00AM - 12:00PM
 - May 12 and 19, 2:00 - 4:00PM
 - Virtual asynchronous: Receive a link to participate through an e-learning platform.
- **Cost:** Free to all grantee organizations (training valued at \$1,500 per organization)
- **Led By:** Dani Rose (Director of Cultural Access, Open Door Arts)
- **Topics:**
 - **Part I — Understanding Disability:** Disability language and culture, models of disability, common barriers to participation, and an introduction to the legal and organizational responsibilities of accessibility.
 - **Part II — Understanding Accessibility:** Practical approaches to accessibility across spaces, programs, services, communications, and operations, with strategies participants readily apply within their organizations.
- **Benefits:**
 - A shared understanding of disability, accessibility, and cultural access.

- o The ability to recognize common barriers and strategies for addressing them.
- o Practical next steps and resources to strengthen accessibility across your organization.

Cultural Access Practitioner Certification

Develop the knowledge and confidence to guide accessibility work within your organization. Led by disabled cultural access experts, this in-depth course leading to certification combines disability-centered learning with legal responsibilities and practical strategies for organizational change. It supports both people new to accessibility and experienced practitioners seeking to deepen and formalize their practice.

- **Who this is for:** The course is relevant to access coordinators, leaders, and staff across cultural organizations. No prior accessibility, legal, or technical background is required.
- **Format and time:** Approximately 20 hours of asynchronous e-learning through an accessible online platform. Participants can complete the course on their own schedule. Participants will have one year to complete the course.
- **Cost:** One individual per UP Designated organization can enroll for free (a \$750 value). Additional staff members or members of organizations that are not UP Designated can enroll for a reduced rate of \$500.
- **Led by:** Dani Rose, Director of Cultural Access at Open Door Arts (featuring disabled cultural accessibility experts and leaders including Sarah J. Hom, Emily Ladau, Keith Jones, Tina Childress, Kim Charlson and Robin Jones)
- **Topics:** The course includes seven modules that connect foundational knowledge with practical approaches to cultural access:
 - 1. Disability History, Culture, and Justice:** Explore disability history, identity, language, rights, and justice as a foundation for accessibility work.
 - 2. Accessible Policies, Practices, and Procedures:** Understand legal responsibilities and how organizational policies and everyday decisions support equitable participation.
 - 3. Accessible Spaces:** Examine physical access, wayfinding, and sensory considerations to create more accessible cultural environments.
 - 4. Access Services:** Learn about services and supports that help people with disabilities participate in cultural experiences.

5. Accessible Communication: Strengthen accessibility across digital platforms, marketing, printed materials, and interactions with participants.

6. Accessible Programming: Incorporate accessibility into the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of cultural programs.

7. Accessibility Evaluation and Transition Planning: Assess current practices, identify priorities, and develop an actionable plan for improving accessibility.

- **Additional support:** Certification participants can join “After Hours” sessions with Dani Rose following each monthly Access Office Hour for continued learning, technical support, and application guidance.
- **Benefits:**
 - Knowledge of disability history, culture, and justice, and how they inform cultural access.
 - Strategies for improving policies, spaces, access services, communications, and programs.
 - Tools to assess accessibility, identify priorities, and develop an actionable improvement plan.
 - Professional recognition of their learning through certification upon successful completion of the course requirements.

Programs

UP Designation

We are preparing to reopen the UP Designation process to our current UP Designated organizations this spring. See the Program updates for more details.

Internal

- Mass Cultural Council is partnering with Open Door Arts on the [Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub](#) to strengthen accessibility across the sector. As part of this work and to meet expectations of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the d/Deaf and Disability and Deaf Equity Plan, we have formed an internal working group to complete the agency's Arts and Culture Self-Assessment Survey. The 300+ question assessment reviews our organizational approach, spaces, technology, communications, and programs, and then produces scored reports highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. The assessment is complete, and staff are working together to review the report, identify

key themes, and develop recommendations for our internal and external accessibility priorities.

- Public Affairs continues to work on meeting WCAG 2.1 AA regulations and the steps needed for archiving the Agency's various ancillary websites and online projects.
- Public Affairs is continuing to work with Program staff, our Indigenous community consultant, Erin Genia, and photography partners to document events and activities hosted by Tribal Cultural Councils, ensuring a wide range of creative expression from our diverse communities is equitably represented across our materials and digital spaces.
- Public Affairs worked closely with our diverse media partners to create awareness and promote the 2026 Massachusetts Storytellers of the Year event, which Mass Cultural Council co-hosted with Mass Humanities. Due to our relationship with these media partners, one of the Storytellers, Bomba de Aqui, was interviewed and featured in two Spanish-speaking outlets: [El Planeta's coverage](#); Somos Berkshires coverage [before event](#) and [after event](#).

Public Affairs Report

October 2026

Budget/Legislative/Advocacy Update

- The Mass Wins Act conference committee is still meeting, and Mass Cultural Council continues to advocate for the Committee to retain an amended version of S. 2169, [our Cultural Facilities Fund \(CFF\) eligibility expansion legislation](#), in its report. If retained and signed into law by the Governor, this policy change will ensure all primarily cultural municipally owned facilities are eligible to apply to CFF for assistance, regardless of the building's age or size. During an October 6 meeting with the Chair of House Ways & Means, who is leading the conference committee for his Chamber, it was confirmed that this proposal was under active negotiation between the House and Senate conference committee members.
- We met with the Chair of House Ways & Means, Rep. Aaron Michlewitz, on October 6 to discuss our proposal to rebrand [STEM to STEAM](#) in the Massachusetts General Laws, H. 561. The bill received a favorable report from the Joint Committee on Education last fall and continues to be under review by the House Committee on Ways & Means. The Chair confirmed that the Committee is not aware of any opposition to the bill and asked his staff to take another look at it. Mass Cultural Council pitched that it was the perfect time for the House to take up H. 561, as October is National Arts & Humanities Month and the week of Oct. 19 is STEM Week. After the meeting, Mass Cultural Council, MassArt, and MASSCreative submitted joint testimony to the Speaker and House Ways & Means advocating for House action on the bill this month.
- On September 14, Mass Cultural Council submitted [testimony](#) to the offices of the Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Senate President and Speaker of the House calling for them to consider using a

portion of the incoming Meta settlement funds to support Creative Youth Development (CYD) and/or after and out-of-school arts and culture programming for youth. This letter resulted in a meeting with the Attorney General's Office on October 5, and we anticipate that this will be an advocacy campaign that continues into the new year. The meeting with the Attorney General's Office was very positive; they were very interested in learning more about CYD and our work in arts based social prescription.

- On September 24, Mass Cultural Council offered a legislative briefing to Members, staff, and interns on our FY27 grant programs and initiatives in the State House. Jointly hosted by Senator Paul Mark and Rep. Sean Garballey, the Chairs of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts & Cultural Development, several staff members were able to present on their areas of work and answer questions. After the session, we hand-delivered informational folders to all 200 legislative offices, which contained their FY26 District Grant Report, the FY27 Programs At-a-Glance, a letter outlining pending policy matters of interest and information on our upcoming grant celebrations, and other Agency promotional materials.
- We are working to develop a policy agenda for the 2027-2028 legislative session and anticipate focusing on areas of investment (FY28 and FY29 budgets; recapitalizing the Cultural Facilities Fund in a bond bill; META settlement funds) and identifying bills filed by partners that are useful to the cultural sector that we can join in and advocate for.

Events/Communications/Digital Communications Update

Events

- In FY27, Public Affairs is partnering with Mass Humanities to organize and host the [2026 Mass Storytellers of the Year Event](#). This celebration was held on the evening of **October 15** at Mill 1 in Holyoke. Thank you to Council Members Tom Bernard and Anika Lopes for joining Mass Cultural Council at this event.
- We are working with the Communities team to organize a convening for Local Cultural Council members and Cultural District representatives from the Cape and Islands on **October 21** at 10am at the 204 Cultural Arts Municipal Building in Harwich. The event will include discussions on regional tourism promotion, grant opportunities, public art, and municipal partnerships. Thank you to Council Member Julie Wake for joining the team at this event.
- Later this fall, we look forward to hosting two regional grant celebration events: [November 16](#), recognizing our investments in western Mass at

Mass MoCA, and [December 1](#) at La CASA in the South End, marking all grants made in the Greater Boston area. Registration is now open for both events; please let Bethann know if you plan to attend.

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

Media/Community Relations

Mass Cultural Council in the news:

Mass Cultural Council

- [Mass Cultural Council Adopts FY27 Spending Plan](#) (Franklin Observer, August 30, 2026)
- [Massachusetts is the No. 1! Obviously](#) (Boston Magazine, September 29, 2026)

Organizational Support

- [Juniper Initiative for Literary Arts and Action receives \\$10,700 from Mass Cultural Council](#) (UMass, September 4, 2026)

Creative Experiences

- [Attleboro area groups receive cultural grants](#) (The Sun Chronicle, September 14, 2026)
- [Medway, Franklin Get Small Chunks of State "Creative Experience" Grants](#) (Franklin Observer, September 20, 2026)
- [We Are Autism Inc. awarded Mass Cultural Council grant for Voices of the Spectrum art exhibit](#) (MassLive, September 24, 2026)

Cultural Facilities Fund

- ['We need a better way': Amherst theater groups seek permanent home](#) (MassLive, September 30, 2026)
- [Amherst Historical Society: Programming Continues While Strong House Museum Undergoes Repairs](#) (AmherstINDY, October 10, 2026)

Please contact Bethann if you encounter a paywall while attempting to access an article linked above. We have subscriptions to many news outlets and may be able to provide a PDF of the article.

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

Web

Updated the web site in support of FY27 activities, including LCC, TCC, Grants for Creative Individuals, CFF, UP Innovation Fund, and Cultural District Investment program guidelines, funding lists, LCC Member Toolkit, and an updated Programs At-a-Glance.

NEW: A [Technical Assistance](#) page to amplify the numerous toolkits and resources staff has developed to champion the sector's collective needs and to expand cross-sector opportunities.

So far this calendar year, [HireCulture.org](#) has had 382,090 views and 70,100 users. That's a 5.5% increase in views and a 2% increase in users year over year.

Blog

Published 17 blog posts since the August Council update - in partnership with Program and Advancement staff - to amplify and document the Agency's work.

Of note, continued making the case for arts/cultural participation as a benefit to public health:

- [Unlocking Arts & Culture Benefits in Housing](#) - MassHousing conference surfaces the keys to enhancing arts, culture, and creativity in their spaces
- [Prescribing Culture: Changing Health Outcomes at MA Community Health Centers](#) - A majority of patients reported improved mental health and well-being after participating in arts and culture experiences.

E-Newsletters

The fall is traditionally a time when we see our lists grow, as the grant season kicks off. Over the last month alone, we gained more than 1,300 new subscribers to our e-newsletters.

Currently, of the Agency's three e-newsletters:

- **Power of Culture** has **35,303 subscribers** and an average of **64% open rate** this quarter.

- **Community Initiative** has **15,483 subscribers** and an average **62% open rate** this quarter.
- **Artist News** has **15,318 subscribers** and an average **56% open rate** this quarter.

Campaigns & Social Media

To kick off our FY27, we've launched the FY27 Programs At-a-Glance campaign. Deliverables include our [Programs At-a-Glance webpage](#) and a printed booklet highlighting our FY27 programs, services, and opportunities.

This year, and in collaboration with previous grantee Gonz Veloz, we featured a vibrant visual artwork on the cover that celebrates the creativity, joy, and energy of the cultural sector.

Social media channels by the numbers:

- o 17.6K Facebook followers
- o 25.3K Instagram followers
- o 9,501 LinkedIn followers
- o 2.19K YouTube subscribers

Photography of the Cultural Sector: Worked closely with two photography partners to document #PowerOfCulture events and activities organized by our grantees and partners around the state. Please visit our social media channels to see the vibrancy of our sector.

Media Partnerships

- **El Planeta Media** – Kicked off our FY27 media partnership promoting our grant opportunities and events with [El Planeta Media](#). This partnership includes social media graphics and videos as well as online articles.

Some examples:

- o Online article - [Mass Cultural Council abre nuevas oportunidades de financiamiento para proyectos de arte y cultura](#)
- o [Facebook post](#)
- o [Instagram Reel](#), and
- o [newsletter mention](#)

- **Somos Berkshires** - Our media partnership with [Somos Berkshires](#) has continued to promote our grant opportunities, events, and initiatives. Here's an example of their coverage: [online article](#) and [social media video](#).

Of note:

- In partnership with Mass Humanities, we've collaborated on a [video featuring Bomba de Aqui](#), the Afro-Puerto Rican dance and music group receiving the 2026 Massachusetts Storytellers of the Year.
- **Rádio Insuperável** – our media partnership with Rádio Insuperável has promoted our FY27 Grant Opportunities. Examples include this [online article about the Local Cultural Council](#) program and this one about [Grants for Creative Individuals](#).

Programs Report

October 2026

Program Operations

Program Operations Team: Jen Lawless, Charles Baldwin, Colin Baylor, Allison Rosenthal

FY27 Grant Cycle Update

To support our equity goals, Mass Cultural Council has expanded the organizations we reach through recruitment and outreach. Our applications have been simplified and streamlined, and eligibility has been expanded over the past 5 years. We have seen a steady increase in applications from organizations in the cultural sector.

To date, we have received 17,788 applications for our FY27 programs:

- 13,960 Local Cultural Council and Tribal Cultural Council applications, the highest number of applications received!
- 3 Social Prescription
- 1,729 Creative Experiences
- 210 YouthReach
- 1,825 Grants for Creative Individuals, application **still open**
- 1 Cultural Facilities Fund, application **still open**
- 20 Cultural District Investment Grant, application **still open**
- 40 UP Innovation Fund Grants, application **still open**

Despite the increases to our budget over the past few years, we have had to turn away an increasing number of organizations. There were 738 organizations

in FY26 that applied for one or more of our direct grant programs and were unsuccessful. We were able to fund 1,685 organizations.

Mass Cultural Council staff reviewed the overlap between programs to see what impact organizations receiving multiple awards had on our ability to serve the sector more broadly.

To ensure that we can fund as many organizations as possible, we implemented the following limits:

1. Cultural Facilities Fund has a 2-year wait period for successful Capital Grant recipients.
2. Organizations can only receive one of the following grants in a fiscal year:
 - Creative Experiences
 - Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP)/Operating Grants for Organizations (OGO)
 - Cultural District Investment Grant
 - Gaming Mitigation Fund
 - YouthReach

Grant Systems Management

The Grant Systems Team of the Mass Cultural Council supports the agency's grantmaking via technical expertise in our grants management system (GMS). We are responsible for database management, reporting, technical grant application support, and delivering customer service/training both internally and externally. We also contribute to policy, program design, and implementation of grant programs.

We continue to work on simplifying and streamlining our processes. Since the start of the fiscal year, in addition to our support of programs, we've analyzed applicant feedback and a public survey of the sector, improved the accessibility of our legislative reports and applications, and contributed to discussions of AI and how it relates to our work. We also participated in the following professional development opportunities:

- Colin Baylor participated in PEAK Grantmaking's Grants Management 101 series and attended PEAK New England's fall chapter meeting on disability justice
- Allie Rosenthal attended the Society for Social Studies in Science conference – highlights included panels on the boundaries of AI art and creative agency.

Access and Inclusion

Universal Participation Initiative: You will see an informational update about the Universal Participation (UP) Designation later in this memo, which was presented at the Programs Committee meeting on October 20, 2026.

Recent/upcoming meetings include:

- UP Innovation Fund Info session: October 13
- Monthly Access Office Hours info session: October 27

Services:

- Site visits: Latin X Cultural Center (Lowell), New Art Center (Newton), Puppet Showplace Theater (Brookline), Tufts University Art Museums (Boston)
- Counsel: Bill Porter (Lesley University)

Education:

- LEAD Conference August 10-14, preconference and 3 learning sessions
- Access 101 for recipients of the Creative Experience grant September 29
- NASAA Assembly Access preconference October 7

Training:

- September 10, Community Access Monitor certification (Mass Office on Disability)
- September 18, Creative Summit on Labor
- October 2, MassAbility Convening on AI and Disability

Ongoing work:

- Attendance with OGO, Artists, and Communities teams. Attended Advancement meetings on Workforce Retention, Arts and Health, and Community Development.
- Regularly scheduled meetings with Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center, New England Foundation for the Arts, Gateway Arts, and Open Door Arts.

Artists & Youth

Dan Blask, Kortney Adams, Kelly Bennett, Summer Confuorto, Käthe Swaback

Grants for Creative Individuals

We are currently accepting applications to the Grants for Creative Individuals program, offering unrestricted \$5,000 to artists and creative practitioners in all artistic/cultural disciplines. Staff led a virtual information session on September 22, 2026 ([see recording](#)), hold weekly office hours, and support applicants via

email and phone. The deadline is October 27, 2026, after which staff will verify the accuracy of applications. Staff will then assemble reviewers from the Massachusetts creative/cultural community who will score each application. We will present grant recommendations (anticipating approx. 500 grants) to the February Program Committee and Governing Council meeting.

YouthReach

This Fall, we were thrilled to notify recipients of the FY27 YouthReach grants. We were pleased to award 84 YouthReach grants totaling \$1.95 million, investing in programs across the Commonwealth that use the arts, humanities, and sciences to support the growth and development of young people. The team presented a grantee/contracts orientation webinar on September 17, 2026, and continues to work with grantees to resolve contract questions and issues. We have also held numerous meetings with declined applicants to share application feedback and other resources for organizations working in Creative Youth Development.

Social Prescription

Elsewhere in these materials, you will find an update on a recommended “year two” of funding for Social Prescription programs through the National Endowment for the Arts “Arts & Health” grant.

Services

- Continued partnership with [Work Without Limits](#), offering benefits counseling so our grantees can understand the impact of our grants on their public benefits.
- Continued support and participation in the [Youth Arts Impact Network](#), connecting and strengthening Creative Youth Development practitioners to bring more resources and opportunities for teaching artists, young people, and youth-focused organizations, including an in-person convening at La Casa in Boston's South End, held September 29, 2026.

Advancement and Partnerships

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

- Compiled weekly “Cross-Sector Resource”, a resource from a non-arts sector, such as mental health, housing, anti-poverty, civil rights, etc., to share in a weekly post on the ArtSake online resource.
- Supported the development of the “Collective Work” convening for creative entrepreneurs, taking place at MassArt on November 7, 2026.

- Ongoing partnership with Governor's Office to exhibit MA artists in the Governor's waiting room at the State House.
- Ongoing leadership by Summer Confuorto of the Agency's Native American and Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee.
- Attended the [Bridging Visual Arts & Healthcare: Impact, Innovation, Research](#) conference showcasing impactful research, evidence-based evaluation, and scholarship that will help move these cross-sector fields forward.

Communities

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

Cultural Districts

In August, the Council approved reserving funds for the 58 current Cultural Districts, \$15,000 for each district. Districts are currently in the process of completing their applications for funding.

Applications for new districts opened in July of 2026. The guidelines for new Cultural Districts focus on strengthening the partnership between the district and the municipality, requiring municipalities to invest financially in the district, make a resolution to adopt a formal ordinance defining the district, require districts to have a part-time paid manager, and provide a detailed GIS map of their district. In addition, Districts will need to choose from three types of governance models that will need to be strengthened with a signed Local Partnership Agreement. The plan must have specific goals that are aligned with municipal and regional goals. New Districts are currently filing Letters of Intent (LOIs), which staff is reviewing and then moving applicants into the application process to apply to be a new District.

Local and Tribal Cultural Council Programs

The FY27 grant cycle for the 329 Local Cultural Councils was completed on October 15. Over 14,000 applications were received, which is approximately 1,000 over the amount received in FY26. The LCCs are now in the process of scheduling and holding grant review meetings and making decisions on local grants for their communities. Their annual reports, including all approved applications, are due on or before January 15, 2027. Once the annual reports are submitted, approved applicants will be notified.

The Tribal Cultural Councils (TCCs) have completed their 3rd grant cycle. In FY27, 4 Tribal Cultural Councils participated in the program. Each TCC will receive \$17,800 to distribute to its tribe. The current TCCs are Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Cultural Council (HPWTCC), Aquinnah Tribal Cultural Council, Nipmuc/k Tribal Cultural Council, and Mâseepee Cultural Council.

Thirty-nine (39) applications were submitted to the tribal cultural councils for this grant cycle.

Creative Experiences

Run **in partnership with Artists & Youth and Organizations**, this program is actively working with grantees and the finance team on the contracting process. The team held an information session with grantees to address common questions and to walk through the process step by step. This group includes the smallest and often least experienced grant recipients, so they need additional support to navigate the payment process. We are proud to support so many first-time grantees with the process, and the goal is to make it as easy as possible!

Creative Experiences is made up of several prior programs – Festivals, CIP Projects, and STARS Residencies. The most recent consolidation began in FY25, when STARS aligned with Festivals & Projects on timeline and application format, and ran as Creative Projects for Schools. The programs fully merged in FY26 as Creative Experiences, and we have two full fiscal years of grant making data now. The team is spending the fall looking at data and trends and evaluating the impact of the consolidation. More information will be shared as the team moves forward.

Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF)

Jay Paget, Miranda Cook

CFF Grants

After the May 2026 grant announcements, staff worked with several applicants who did well in the review process, but whose implementation timelines were long enough to allow a six-month wait. We reached out for project updates, estimates or bids for the work, resumes, and updates on fundraising progress, operating plans, and timelines.

In September and October, the CFF Advisory Committee and MassDevelopment Board voted to finalize four new capital grant recommendations and to approve the FY27 Guidelines. The grant recommendations total \$706,000.

The new CFF application went live on October 8 and will be due December 10.

Staff will conduct an Information Session on October 22 that will be available on YouTube. We will also have office hours twice a week until the application deadline.

Creative Space Development Network Accelerator

We continue to host more Creative Space DNA Zoom sessions. Here are some of the recent and future sessions:

September 25, 2026 – Understanding Leases.

Featuring:

- Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts
- Bellforge Art Center
- Gloucester Center for the Arts
- Charlestown Rehearsal Studios

October 30, 2026 – Municipal Creative Trusts

Featuring:

- Metropolitan Area Planning Council
- Somerville and Cambridge Arts Councils
- Mass Creative

November 20, 2026 – Adaptive Reuses of Houses of Worship

Featuring:

- Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre, Cambridge
- Bombyx Center for Arts & Equity, Florence
- Steeple Playhouse, New Bedford

Organizations

Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalyn King, Lillian Lee

Operating Grants for Organizations

Grant announcements for the Operating Grants for Organizations and the Cultural Investment Portfolio were made following the August Council meeting. The Council awarded grants to 403 organizations, and all organizations were informed in early September. This included 38 additional one-year grants to organizations based on the application scores from the previous grant cycle. These awards were made possible by additional funds allocated to the grant program and by awarding one-year grants to replace organizations that moved from operating support to the multi-year YouthReach program.

Organizations Team hosted an orientation session webinar for all grantees on October 8th. These orientation webinars have been very helpful for new staff

and new grantees to understand the grant program and their contract responsibilities.

Gaming Mitigation Fund

Program Officer Lillian Lee has been developing the next cycle of the Gaming Mitigation program. The focus has been on streamlining the reporting process and providing alternative reporting systems. The FY27 Gaming Mitigation program will open in December 2026.

Card to Culture

Program Officer Lindiana Flores supports the 600 organizations registered to participate in the Card to Culture program and maintains relationships with the state agency partners. On October 5, she led a webinar for Card to Culture organizations focused on creating a welcoming culture for all cultural participants. [The Card to Culture: Culture of Care Webinar](#) is now available on Mass Cultural Council's YouTube channel and has been promoted to cultural organizations.

Universal Participation (UP) Update

To: Mass Cultural Council
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Charles Baldwin
Date: October 29, 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 the [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.

Finance Update

October 2026

To: Mass Cultural Council
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Kate McDougall, Ashley Freeman, Alanah T. Haynes, Anitha Kanthaiah, Tom Luongo, Marc Sulmonte
Date: October 29, 2026
Re: Finance Update

Finance Team Update

The finance team is working hard to pay the grants approved at the August meeting. Contracts involve several rounds of documents and can be challenging for first-time grantees or new staff at returning grantees. The Finance team partners with each program team to offer grantee info sessions. The Finance team is deeply engaged in constituent support via email, phone calls, and video meetings, answering questions and offering guidance and encouragement. We are ahead of schedule compared to last year. The following offers a glimpse of this behind-the-scenes work:

- 1,117 contract packages in process
- 149 contracts executed

Later this month, we will be starting to prepare and submit our FY28 budget request for Administration and Finance. This is an important first step in the FY28 budget process.

FY27 Spending Report

We are about four months into the fiscal year, and [our Council approved spending plan](#). Our spending remains on target or slightly below projections across most areas. Spending typically lags in the first half of the year because it takes time to set up contracts, pay out grants, and initiate services/projects. As contracts are finalized and projects advance, we expect spending to increase steadily, aligning with our projections for the latter part of the fiscal year.

This summary presents a comparison between the Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of October 20, 2026, encompassing our core appropriation:

- Total FY27 Council-Approved Budget Allocations (Core): \$28,106,072
- Total Expenses as of 10/20/26(Core): \$4,426,586 or %16

Figure 1: Spending by Expense Categories as of 10/20/2026.

Expense Category	State Funding - Approved Allocations	Expenses 10/20/26	Percentage of Funds Expended
AA: Salary	4,567,450	1,495,875	33%
BB: Employee Reimbursement	112,501	17,691	16%
CC: Contracted Staff	-	-	0%
DD: Payroll Tax and Fringe	96,830	14,411	15%
EE: Administrative Expenses	197,489	28,654	15%
GG: Rent and Electricity	397,000	150,958	38%
HH: Consulting Services	319,300	28,260	9%
JJ: Programmatic Services	224,183	6,135	3%
KK: Non-IT Equipment	7,000	-	0%
LL: Leases	12,000	2,343	20%
PP: Grant Programs	21,035,602	2,557,900	12%
PP: Legislative Earmarks	758,000	-	0%
UU: Information Technology	378,717	124,359	33%
Totals	28,106,072	4,426,586	16%

Supplemental Funding

In our regular Council updates, we include a summary comparing actual expenses to Council-approved budget allocations, covering both core appropriations and supplemental funding sources. As of October 20, 2025, no expenditures have been incurred under the Gaming Fund, Cultural Facilities Fund, or NEA Federal Trust accounts. Spending from these sources is anticipated to begin in November or December 2026.

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

FY27 Federal Funds

Mass Cultural Council was awarded \$1.26M from the NEA in FY27, which must be matched with an additional \$1.26 million from our state allocation. Recipients of these \$2.52 million federal funds or match funds will be subject to additional federal requirements to which other grantees are not subject. Staff select which approved grantees will receive federal or match funds. Staff select grantees that have accepted and successfully managed federal funds in the past and additionally select larger organizations that have the staff and capacity to manage the additional requirements of federal funds. To acknowledge this additional work, Mass Cultural Council pays grants funded by federal funds 100% upon contract completion, in contrast to our typical 80%/20% payment schedule for other grantees.

To date, we have notified all proposed grantees of the federal and match funds, and none have raised concerns with accepting federal funds under the current federal administration. Last year, three organizations contacted us with concerns. At the time of writing, only three organizations were left to complete their contract materials. We have fully executed the remaining 76 organizations' contracts, and their grants have already been paid.

FY28 NEA Application

We have submitted our FY28 grant application to the National Endowment for the Arts. The application covers our annual funding requests for NEA Partnership, Arts and Health, Poetry Out Loud, Folk and Traditional Arts, and Arts Education programs. We anticipate being awarded approximately \$1.26 million in funding for FY28.

Out-of-State Travel Update

October 2026

To: Mass Cultural Council
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Kate McDougall
Date: October 29, 2026
Re: Out-of-State Travel Update July 1-October 31, 2026

Out-of-State Travel

Executive Committee Approved Travel

Under Mass Cultural Council's newly revised Out-of-State Travel Policy, on August 13, the Executive Committee approved a travel request for the Executive Director to attend [NASAA Assembly 2026, Washington, DC, October 7 – 9, 2026](#) (although the estimated cost has increased by another night, as Dave was invited to join the “New Executive Directors Roundtable” the day before the full conference begins in order to provide a unique “perspective on transition dynamics, advocacy and operations.”)

Executive Director Approved Travel

Under Mass Cultural Council's newly revised Out-of-State Travel Policy, the Executive Director approved out-of-state travel for several staff members. Each trip has been determined to provide a clear public benefit, advance the Council's Strategic and Equity Plans, and represent a cost-effective use of resources. All required Travel Authorization Forms, Procurement Request Forms, and State Ethics disclosures will be on file prior to the travel dates.

[NASAA Assembly 2026, Washington, DC, October 7 – 9, 2026](#)

Additionally, this quarter, Dave approved travel for seven additional staff members to also attend NASAA Assembly 2026 (two of whom have received travel stipends and fee waivers), such amounts being within the out-of-state travel budget for the approved FY27 Spending Plan.

NASAA's Assembly 2026 is a dynamic, in-person gathering that brings together arts and cultural leaders from across the country who will engage in two days of shared learning, peer exchange, and conversation about the future of public support for the arts. This conference is both a celebration of the work happening across the field and an opportunity to connect, learn, and collaborate. Participants engage in sessions exploring timely trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping the arts sector; peer gatherings for executive leaders, Commissioners/Council Members, and job-alike groups; and unifying plenary sessions featuring national perspectives and inspiring voices. A [full agenda](#) is available online.

The attendees, Dave, Jen, Erik, Christian, Timothea, Charles, Kortney, and Summer, found the conference very valuable, and below is a summary of some individual highlights:

- “Attending NASAA was extremely valuable for my work as Cultural Districts Program Officer. Over the week with the Community Development Peer Group, we visited Anacostia, Washington, DC’s only arts and culture district, where we heard from Executive Director Kristina Noelle and from the cultural organizations and artists working there. The visit showed clear parallels with our Massachusetts districts and gave useful insight into the challenges and benefits of operating as a state-designated District, but also as a Business Improvement District. In other sessions, I connected with Cultural District Managers from across the country to compare how states run their grant programs and incentives, discuss shared challenges, and advise states interested in launching programs modeled on ours. Key themes included district marketing and branding, community development, and technology tools that state arts agencies use to administer and manage their districts. I came away with valuable new contacts, an opportunity to help organize a working committee within the peer group, and a strong commitment to staying involved with NASAA.”
- “I appreciated the opportunity to connect with Communications staff from state arts agencies throughout the country and to exchange ideas about messaging around the importance of public support for arts and culture. I also learned a lot about some interesting initiatives underway at other states, including new models of doing business as an artist and some upcoming potential sources of funding that state arts agencies may be able to tap into.”
- “I especially appreciated our Folk & Traditional Arts Program Managers and Arts Education Managers joint peer session group. The discussions with staff from other SAAs inspired my thinking about ways we can integrate traditional artists into classrooms and educational settings.”

- “The development of the Access preconference for LEAD included an Access preconference for NASAA. With the dismissal of the 504/ADA Coordinator at MI Arts who was to lead the NASAA session, I was called to step in. I secured Betty Siegel and Lorena Bradford from VSA Arts at the Kennedy Center as speakers to provide foundational principles for afternoon discussion. With assistance from Josh Brown (NE), Teresa Davis (IL), and Lindsay Dandeo (NJ), the afternoon provided distinct engagement techniques to build community and identify common challenges.”
- “Invitation from Chairman Carter to lead a panel on arts prescription at an upcoming international arts and health convening the NEA will be hosting in November 2027”
- “The NEA is collecting information from others on payer codes, similar to our conversations and grant making, with private insurers.”
- “Learned about the resources of the Arts Education Partnership. Specifically, their research and strategies to support Advancement work around Workforce Development, drawing on "durable skills" data to build cross-sector support for the arts.”
- “Fantastic case study of a 17-organization collaboration in Washington, D.C., working together to train, support, and prepare youth for the creative workforce.”
- “Latest research from Rhode Island finds that sustained, multi-year arts programming has an incredible impact on chronic absenteeism.” (links below)
 - Press Release: [Governor McKee, RIDE, RISCA Release Report Linking Consistent Arts Education Participation with Lower Absenteeism | RISCA](#)
 - Report: [RI FINAL CA Memo 2026 Final](#)
- “Useful resources to support my personal learning journey around Creative Aging.”
- “Great overview and insight into dedicated revenue streams across the country. Many creative models of funding to enhance general appropriations. All require continued advocacy and work to secure and maintain. Kelly Barsdate’s top tip: “make sure the juice is worth the squeeze.”
- “Learning more about [Artist Corporations](#) (aka A-Corps) in Colorado. They are a form of LLC where artist protections and rights are built by

default. Will be interesting to watch/learn from Colorado once artists start filing. May be another potential way to protect artists' IP and keep their personal finances/assets separate from their creative finances/assets and liabilities."

Reclaiming Vacant Properties (RVP) Conference, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 22 – 25, 2026

Finally, Miranda Cook, Program Officer, Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) was approved for out-of-state travel to attend the 2026 Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (September 22 – 25). The Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference (RVP) is the only national event dedicated to tackling vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties and advancing community revitalization. Since 2007, RVP has brought together more than 1,000 leaders from local governments, nonprofits, land banks, philanthropy, real estate, and community organizations to share bold ideas and proven strategies. The conference included hands-on workshops, neighborhood tours, and dozens of sessions covering every stage of the property revitalization cycle.

Out-of-State Travel Expenditures- Quarter I

Figure 1: Summary of FY27 out-of-state travel expenses as of 10/20/26.

Out-of-State Travel	Expense Paid YTD	Projected Expense Remaining	Less Anticipated Reimbursement	Total Expense
LEAD Conference	\$2,887.18	-	\$(1,655.50)	\$1,231.68
NASAA Conference	\$4,802.43	\$6,617.49	\$(2,000.00)	\$9,419.92
RVP Conference	\$1,833.90	-	-	\$1,833.90
Total Expense to Agency				\$12,485.50

- FY27 Spending plan out-of-state travel budget: \$22,000.
- FY27 Remaining out-of-state travel funds: \$9,514.

Conflict of Interest Notifications

Mass Cultural Council Members

Updated October 22, 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

- a. Foundation to be Named Later

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. The Truro Playwright Collective
- c. 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 Social Prescription, Arts & Health Grant Recommendations

To: Mass Cultural Council
From: David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, Käthe Swaback
Date: October 29, 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.

Advancement Report

October 2026

FY27 Advancement and Strategic Partnerships

In our FY27 Planning documents, we outlined three key areas of focus: Narrative Change, Cross-Sector Alignment, and the Creative Wealth Fund. This memo offers a brief update on progress in each of these areas.

Narrative Change

We believe that arts and culture have measurable impacts on some of the most pressing challenges facing the Commonwealth. We continue to nurture relationships with partners and champions across the public and private sector to support new opportunities and resources for our field at significant levels. This includes:

- Creativity as a catalyst and driver for the STEM and innovation economy. Our goal in this work is not to position the arts as being in service to other industries, but to expand opportunities for college graduates and youth to live a creative life of their choosing at different stages of life.
- We continue to work with health care partners, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and others to position the arts and culture sector as one of the largest non-clinical behavioral health workforces in the Commonwealth, supported by a growing body of peer-reviewed research.

Cross-Sector Alignment- Resource development with other sectors

- **Workforce Development**
 - We are working with MassArt to co-produce a conference on November 7 for Creative Entrepreneurs to connect and grow.

- We continue to work closely with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to expand the opportunities of our sector to utilize more than \$566.5 million in Workforce Development dollars. We are hosting a webinar on October 1 to connect our field with pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship offerings through EOL.
- **Community Development and Housing**
 - The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) recently announced \$3.5 million in Creative Placemaking grants. This is in addition to \$300,000 in Creative Placemaking grants from MassHousing.
 - The Downtown Interagency Partnership, with EOED, MassDevelopment, and a new champion in Undersecretary Patrick Field, is developing a Downtown Strategic Action Plan to align state policy, funding, and programming under a single, coordinated framework. This work centers creative economies and cultural districts and positions Mass Cultural Council in all downtown investments and decision-making across the Commonwealth.
- **Arts and Health**
 - We continue to expand our role in the health care ecosystem by supporting SocialRx with continued funding from the NEA to work with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).
 - We continue in a national leadership role in the utilization of Opioid Relief Funds with more than 20 communities at various stages of utilizing those funds.
 - We are actively working with Public Affairs, local and national coalitions to position the sector for META Settlement dollars.
 - We are leveraging the tremendous success of Card to Culture by tying it to research on cultural participation, supporting the narrative of our role in specific areas of health care in the Commonwealth.

Creative Wealth Fund

- We have begun work with a small group to lay the foundations for the Creative Wealth Fund. At our October 29 Council meeting, we will discuss the fund's mission, vision, and objectives with the Council.

Emerging Philanthropic Partnerships

- We are actively in conversation with four different funders to coordinate funding strategies and explore statewide collective funding partnerships.

Massachusetts Creative Wealth Fund

October 2026

Creative Wealth Fund Goals

During the October 2026 Council meeting, we want to engage Council members as thought partners in the earliest stage of developing the Massachusetts Creative Wealth Fund. This document is a condensed version of a presentation to be given at this meeting that will provide more detail. It outlines:

- What a Creative Wealth Fund is
- How it works
- What our role is at the Mass Cultural Council
- Specific questions we will seek feedback on at the Council Meeting

1. What is a Creative Wealth Fund?

A Creative Wealth Fund is designed to be a long-term investment fund that holds shares in the value of the Commonwealth's cultural sector, on behalf of the community that creates it, and grows those shares to be a permanent, compounding funding source for investment in the sector.

2. How it works

A Creative Wealth Fund makes investments in the long-term value that arts and culture creates in Massachusetts. It is a financial vehicle that will be used to support projects and initiatives that yield compounding long-term returns, similar to how other sectors invest in startups and companies. The Fund will accept philanthropic and private investments with the goal of capturing long-term value to reinvest in additional artistic projects. Some concrete examples of what this could look like include:

- **Bluey:** This series was heavily subsidized in two parts by the Australian government: the pilot and the securing of broadcasting rights.
- **Hamilton:** Before becoming a multi-million-dollar Broadway and Disney+ phenomenon, the National Endowment for the Arts played a pivotal role as an initial funder.
- **Peanuts:** The residual royalties of Charles Schulz's Peanuts comics IP continue to provide funding for arts and culture programs for Santa Rosa.
- **Artist Endowed Funds: Creation and modernization of Artist Estate Funds:** These are funds from successful artists, current and past, that total approximately \$9 billion, according to the [Aspen Institute](#).

3. Mass Cultural Council's role

As will be described in the presentation, Mass Cultural Council's role would be limited to what we do best: leading the formation of the Fund and having input through governance seats on the entity that makes distributions from the Fund back to the Massachusetts cultural sector.

In the proposed structure that will be presented, the Council would be insulated from ownership of the Fund and from any financial management or investment responsibilities. The Council's role could be:

- Co-authoring the mission charter
- Co-authoring eligibility for investments
- Co-authoring the policy under which wealth fund distributions are made back to Mass Cultural Council

4. Questions for the Council

Thought partnership can be relentlessly broad, especially in the initial stages of developing a new, complex idea without clear precedent. Therefore, we are providing the questions below as enabling constraints for our conversation to make the best use of our time.

- **What questions do you have about our role in the Fund?**
- **Where might philanthropic, industry, and other investments originate?**
- **Considering the extensive knowledge our Agency staff hold around field needs, and assuming long-term success in capital formation, where might distributions be best placed?** (i.e., how should we use the funds provided to us?) This could include enhancing our existing programs with more and larger grants, other investments to close the living wage gap for artists, investing in infrastructure for our field, etc.