Mass Cultural Council

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

Minutes
Mass Cultural Council
Advancement Committee
Friday, August 21, 2026

Online Meeting

Committee Members Present:

- Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Committee Chair
- Ché Anderson, Council Chair
- Jo-Ann Davis, Council Vice Chair
- Diane Asadorian Masters
- Tom Bernard
- Joyce Linehan
- Anika Lopes
- Allyce Najimy

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 Strategic Partnerships & Advancement
- Carolyn Cole, Special Projects Manager for Advancement
- Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager

Co-Chair Ché Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:06am. He asked if members had reviewed the minutes of their June meeting, and if they had, he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Joyce Linehan moved to approve the minutes; Diane Asadorian Masters seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that David Kong, Rhonda Anderson, and Petrina Martin were absent, it was unanimously

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2026 Advancement Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Iván opened by sharing an overview on the strategic thinking and goals of the Advancement Committee. He noted that one topic discussed with the Chair Ché Anderson had been activating the Committee to think about investments in the cultural economy writ large, borrowing inspiration from some of the funds created by MassDevelopment to spur greater growth in those sectors.

He said the Committee could potentially be leveraged to invite more public and private investment and partnerships in the arts. One idea that the group had continued to think through, and on which he wanted additional feedback, was the creation of a public-private fund to help advance the cultural and creative economy.

Iván described the idea of bringing other people to the table, particularly those who may not currently see themselves as part of the sector to invite them to have a deeper role. He asked whether the group could think ambitiously about raising a designated amount of money that could be used for the cultural economy.

He noted that some of this thinking had started before the executive leadership transition and raised the question of how to push the idea forward so that when new leadership is in place, that individual would inherit ideas that could leverage the Committee in ways the group had been hoping to see.

Iván said he hesitated to throw out a number but asked whether it would be possible to raise $50 million or $100 million for the creative economy. He questioned how the group could set an ambitious goal and bring people around the table to think about it.

He emphasized that the thinking was very preliminary and asked how the group could establish an ambitious goal that would encourage leveraging the private sector and looking beyond the money allocated by the state.

Diane Masters noted that many Committee members raise money from the private sector in their day jobs, creating a potential conflict. She asked who would be responsible for raising the money.

Dave said the group would address how the fund could work legally and encouraged members to continue the discussion, noting that there was more to cover and that the structure would follow from the goals.

Iván thanked Diane for raising the point and said that Dave and Erik would speak more about the contours of the proposal. He said the discussion would need to address the natural questions of who would conduct the fundraising, where the fundraising would go, and how conflicts would be navigated.

He explained that he wanted to tee up the idea before turning the discussion over to Dave and Erik. The larger takeaway, he said, was whether the group could be ambitious in thinking through how cultural work is being done in the state, in the same way that other state agencies have moved toward galvanizing not just tax dollars or mitigation, but broader investment in their sectors.

Iván said the goal would be to activate other people—not just through philanthropy, but also through the private sector—and bring them into the space so they could see that they had a stake in the outcome.

Iván said the group should think ambitiously and creatively about bringing additional financial resources into the sector beyond the confines of the legislative budget and the Agency's existing resources. He then turned the discussion over to Dave.

Dave thanked the Chair and everyone for attending. He said he wanted to briefly address the wide-reaching advancement activities and their results, noting that a lot had happened since the previous meeting.

He said the Agency had reviewed work involving arts in health, individual artists, youth, workforce development, and the agency's broader efforts. Advancement had truly become one of the pillars of the agency's work. Whenever the agency considered an initiative, it would now look at it through an advancement lens.

Dave said that as the Committee heard about the Agency's strategic partnership work, members should think about how constituents could benefit and how residents of the Commonwealth could benefit.

He then asked Erik to summarize the work.

Erik said the memo provided to the Committee was quite large, but that he wanted to document everything in one place. He said it took a lot of courage to undertake narrative change and that he wanted to provide an overall strategic frame before pivoting to FY27.

Erik explained that FY26 was the first year the Agency was fully staffed and had the infrastructure to build Advancement as a pillar of the Agency. The goal was to move arts and culture from being a recipient of philanthropy to being recognized as a problem-solving partner in areas such as health, housing, workforce, and climate. He said the arts had demonstrated benefits in each of those areas.

Erik acknowledged that he did not know whether the public narrative had fully caught up with that understanding. The Agency has had success expanding the narrative, and there was always hope that people would understand the full value of the arts, but he emphasized that hope was not a strategy and that this was why the Agency was doing the work.

He said the Agency intended all Advancement work to be a net revenue generator—to create more money for the field than it cost the Agency. He said the Agency had achieved that in multiples in FY26, investing much less than the new resources generated, with those resources not coming at the cost of the Agency's appropriation.

Erik then highlighted several areas of work across the agency.

The Advancement team is an executive team priority and partnered with Public Affairs, all staff, and external partners. Depending on the discipline, the work involved collaboration with public and private partners.

In healthcare, Erik said the Agency's work had continued to serve as a foundation for the national growth of arts prescription work. The Agency was expanding the work across the Commonwealth and has a strong partner in SocialRx (formerly Art Pharmacy).

There were 364 arts partners in the program, and 62 had been offered a referral so far. He noted that a majority of patients were minority participants.

He said much of the work related to social isolation. Theater and performance venues had the highest participation, with people participating 81% of the time.

Erik referenced a 2025 study indicating that adherence to SSRIs was 33%, contrasting that with the participation in the Agency's arts prescription work. He said the highest impact was in dance, which had the highest clinical impact according to the World Health Organization.

He also said the Agency had become a leader in accessing opioid relief funds—funds that could not be accessed by the federal government. The Agency was focusing on the municipal level, with $90 million expected by 2038.

He noted that Massachusetts was the first state in the country to access funds for social prescription and said the Agency hoped to expand that work in the future.

Turning to individual artists, Erik said MITx had launched an online, publicly available arts entrepreneurship course. A total of 1,430 students participated in the course during its first year. The student population spanned 81 countries, with the majority coming from New England.

He noted that 35% of participants made between $0 and $1,000 from their art, demonstrating that many artists need help in making a livable wage.

The Agency also organized a series of convenings with higher education institutions. The team convened deans, provosts, faculty, and staff initially focusing on curriculum. Erik said the good news was that the curricular gap was improving.

He said the larger challenge was how to build partnerships—bringing people into the Commonwealth and using their expertise.

On workforce development, Erik described significant work to bridge some of the existing gaps.

The STEAM Subcommittee had launched, and the Agency was part of the STEM Advisory Council, which included four secretaries and STEM leaders. The group had met twice, with a third meeting scheduled for September 8.

The Agency was working to integrate arts and creativity into the Commonwealth and to reimagine what STEAM meant. Erik said that, at its simplest, STEAM had become an acronym essentially just meaning, "Let's include the arts."

However, he noted creativity as the top skill sought by employers and said it was essential to the innovation economy and arts are an avenue to creativity. He emphasized the importance of ensuring graduates could access opportunities.

In housing, the agency had deployed a creative placemaking grant. Also, Agency staff worked with housing partners to host a convening focused on incorporating arts into building community at housing developments.

The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities had also put out a creative housing grant representing a significant investment.

Erik said the Agency had been successful early on in generating revenue. It was working with national partners to design a national database for youth development outcomes and had received funding from the Wallace Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

The Agency had also focused closely on work with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, recognizing the role that the arts play in communication and climate resiliency.

Erik said the takeaway was that each of these public and private dollars, and every platform involved, represented something the arts sector had not had access to before the Agency deployed its Advancement work.

He emphasized that this was only the beginning and represented the first year of investing in this approach.

In addition to the private sector, the agency was in contact with private philanthropy, including the VH1 Save The Music Foundation. Erik said the Agency was scheduled to meet with the foundation's president and staff the following month and was actively discussing investment in Boston Public Schools.

Turning to FY27, Erik said the Agency had built a broad range of relationships and champions across industry and public agencies and now needed to determine how to leverage them.

He described Advancement work as a grants multiplier because it pulled outside capital into the field. It also built advocacy infrastructure, allowing the Agency to move forward with colleagues from other agencies rather than advocating alone.

Erik said Advancement built the conditions that made future grants and appropriations easier to justify and expand, while also expanding the core business of the agency.

Iván thanked Erik and encouraged Committee members to comment.

Erik then pivoted to the FY27 focus, identifying three areas.

The first was narrative change and expansion. He noted that the concept of the creative economy had not been widely discussed 30 years ago until Richard Florida wrote about it, after which it became a much more common concept.

Erik said the Agency was not an economic development agency, but if it did its work well, economic development would be a positive outcome. He noted that the same approach could be applied to other areas such as health.

The second area was individual relationships. Erik said the Agency needed to find champions. This included committees and convenings such as the STEAM Subcommittee, external communications, and policy work.

The third area was internal work. He said the Agency worked with all of its staff and had relationships with communities across workforce, health, community development, and housing. Those represented three areas for staff focus.

Iván thanked Erik, describing the presentation as comprehensive and useful for understanding the moving parts. He appreciated the comments about the intersectional nature of the work, particularly in housing and health.

Iván said the discussion reminded him of previous conversations about the impact of the arts in simple ways, including traffic calming, transit, and public safety.

Ché thanked Erik and said he appreciated his enthusiasm, adding that this was the level of excitement the sector should have. He raised questions about how aspirational the proposal was and said he thought the direction was important. He noted that one question people would have was what the Agency's metrics were being measured against and what comparable organizations were doing.

He described three areas of discussion: benchmarking similar organizations to understand what they were doing, conversations with people in the investment world, and information being heard from the sector.

Ché said that week he had held four meetings with organizational leaders. He said every meeting began with appreciation for the Agency's support and discussion of what it paid for, followed by conversations about the sector and concerns about the next few years.

He said those conversations consistently came from the perspective of infrastructure and that organizations were looking for hope and inspiration.

Ché said he viewed the proposal as an opportunity to supplement the work already being done. He said the work Bethann did with the legislature was impressive, while also emphasizing that there were opportunities for individuals and the Agency to do more and push further.

He thanked Erik, Iván, and the rest of the Committee. He said the work would need to be nuanced based on the Committee's capacities and that members would all be asked to do something.

Iván said he appreciated how Ché was framing the Agency's role, describing it as a catalyst.

Anika Lopes shared that she was taking in the discussion and appreciated Erik's report, Ché's comments, and the questions raised by Diane. She acknowledged that there was a significant task ahead, particularly while Massachusetts was losing residents. The state has historically been a place many artists leave, moving to places where opportunities were more abundant. She said there was considerable positivity in focusing on what Massachusetts already had. She noted that Massachusetts had historically separated the arts from housing and other industries and said there was a need to normalize having creatives at every table. She pointed to other organizations and places around the country that had placed more emphasis on this kind of integration. She described it as an opportunity for a more organic addition, leaving room and creating pathways. Anika said she was excited about what could come from thinking about ways to pursue this work. She emphasized storytelling, while noting that storytelling can sometimes become saturated before it becomes sustainable. She said she liked the focus on recentering—calling attention to who had been lost, making room for the arts in every corner, and focusing on being expansive.

Iván then asked whether there were any additional comments before turning the discussion back to Dave.

Dave explained that he and Erik would provide context for the funding recommendation they were bringing to the Committee, requesting that it recommend the FY27 spending for Advancement proposal to the full Council.

He noted that, unlike a grant program, the exact forms of the proposed spending were not yet clear and could include consultants, events, or other activities. The Agency was looking at a set-aside of the proposed amounts.

Dave said staff had outlined three spending proposals: Measuring the Creative Economy, a Cross-Sector Statewide Convening, and the MA Creative Wealth Fund which were described in greater detail in the meeting materials.

Allyce Najimy asked who would operate the Wealth Fund discussed in the materials if the Agency would not.

Erik clarified that the Agency would not operate the proposed fund. It might have a governance role to make sure the fund was operating appropriately, but the Agency was not a financial entity. He noted that a company called Pinnacle was working with the Agency as an adviser as part of that feasibility process.

Allyce said she was confused about the structure and asked whether the Committee would raise the funds and give them to another entity, with the structure to be determined later. She also asked why the Agency would want to create the fund if it would not fully own it.

Erik responded that without the Agency, the fund would not happen and that by serving as the catalyst, the Agency would have a seat at the table.

Diane shared her direct experience setting up a trust fund for public television so that public television would not have to be out soliciting donors. She said the process had taken three years and involved extensive legal work. She noted that lawyers had made a lot of money through the process and that Bain Capital had also been involved. Diane said that the more they investigated the structure, the more they realized they were getting nothing out of it. Investors wanted their money out and wanted returns. She cautioned that if an organization was not the major shareholder, it would not necessarily have control or direction at the table. She said the fund technically existed, but it did not function under public television in the way they had originally envisioned.

Erik said it was useful to know about Diane's experience and suggested that the Committee should talk more about the three-year scope involved in raising capital.

Diane added that the Agency was a government agency and therefore had all sorts of additional guardrails against doing something of this nature.

Vice Chair, Jo-Ann Davis thanked Erik for discussing the proposal. She said it would be helpful to clarify what the Agency was asking the Committee to do regarding a feasibility study. She said she was not sure she understood the proposal or exactly what it would entail, but believed the intention was to conduct a feasibility study so the Committee could understand how the concept fit within the Agency's mission.

Erik said there were more questions than answers at this stage.

Iván explained that part of the feasibility study would be to identify the pros and cons, understand the roadblocks, and determine what was within the Agency's mandate.

Ché cautioned against putting the cart before the horse but said there was value in conducting a study. He said the study might determine that there was an opportunity worth pursuing and that having a team and Committee examine the idea was appropriate.

Ché said there was nothing wrong with conducting a study to determine whether there was sufficient opportunity to proceed. He said the idea represented an opportunity to step outside the box somewhat and expressed enthusiasm about doing the work.

Dave noted that the Agency had a reputation for innovation and had helped form a national movement on Creative Youth Development. While the agency did not have a national remit, it now had a national area of practice.

At that point there were no further questions or comments. Joyce had to depart the meeting early and left a note with Ann, who read it to the Committee:

I apologize that I have to miss this important vote. If it is possible for me to vote by proxy, I am 100% supportive and vote yes enthusiastically in theory. I do have questions about procurement, if someone wants to follow up with me. I am sure it has been thought about. That fund is something we have been talking about and proposing for decades! Exploring feasibility is absolutely the right thing to do at this juncture.

Iván asked Dave and Erik to follow up.

Erik likened the proposal to the Agency's earlier work in arts prescription. He recalled that in 2013 he had gone with previous Executive Director Anita Walker to the home of a high-ranking health insurance executive. He said the initial response had been laughter, followed by the person composing themselves and wishing them good luck.

Iván then asked for a motion and a second to recommend the proposed spending to the full Council, who would vote on the FY27 spending plan at its next meeting. Ché moved to recommend the proposed spending; Allyce seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that Petrina Martin, David Kong, Rhonda Anderson, Joyce Linehan, and Tom Bernard were absent, it was unanimously

> RESOLVED: To recommend the proposed Advancement spending for FY27 to the full Council.

Iván adjourned the meeting at 11:16am.