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Contact: Gregory Liakos, Communications Director, 617-858-2720

Mass. Cultural Council Launches UP Inclusive Design Initiative, Announces First Participants

(Worcester, MA) – The Mass Cultural Council is putting inclusive design at the center of its work with cultural organizations across the Commonwealth with the creation of its new initiative: UP. The initiative officially launches tonight with a kickoff event at the Worcester Art Museum, itself a participating UP organization.

The goal of UP is to support nonprofit cultural organizations that incorporate inclusive design to expand audiences and enhance experiences for all. UP celebrates organizations that embrace inclusivity as core to their mission, creating transformational experiences for the public that will not only build their own capacity, but inform the cultural sector’s accessibility efforts. UP recognizes that accessibility is and should be a work in progress. UP is a direction, not a destination. UP is about process, not perfection.

“I’m delighted to make Massachusetts the first state to put inclusive design at the heart of the work being done by our cultural organizations,” said Mass Cultural Council Executive Director Anita Walker. “Our goal is to make Massachusetts the most accessible place in the world to experience arts and culture and we’re kicking off this new initiative with a group of dynamic, energized, committed organizations from across the Commonwealth. Let’s go to work.”

UP was developed in collaboration with the Institute for Human Centered Design, VSA Massachusetts, and other organizations leading the field in accessibility. Organizations can participate in UP in one of two ways—by obtaining an UP designation or by participating in the UP Innovation and Learning Network. 11 organizations have received UP designations. They include:

* Boston Landmarks Orchestra
* DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln
* Liars & Believers, Cambridge
* Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
* Museum of Science, Boston
* Old South Association, Boston
* Paul Revere Memorial Association, Boston
* The Boston Conservatory
* VSA Massachusetts, Boston
* Wheelock Family Theatre, Boston
* Williamstown Theatre Festival

10 organizations will participate in the yearlong Innovation and Learning Network:

* Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield
* Historic Deerfield
* Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln
* New Art Center, Newton
* Old Sturbridge Village
* Open Door Theater of Acton
* South Shore Conservatory, Hingham
* The Discovery Museums, Acton
* Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield
* Worcester Art Museum

**UP Designation**

Designated UP Organizations are organizations that have made a commitment to learn, take action, and embrace inclusivity as a core organizational value. Each designated organization is entitled to post the UP logo on its website, in its collateral materials, and in its facility; is promoted by Mass Cultural Council as an UP organization through the agency’s website and newsletters; and becomes part of a network of likeminded organizations with which to connect and share. UP Organizations:

* Provide training for all about inclusive culture. The best inclusive design solutions will never succeed without the commitment and engagement of board, staff, volunteers, designers and others taking part in the work of the organization.
* Engage user/experts to inform and inspire. A user expert can be anyone with a functional limitation or disability who has developed natural expertise in dealing with the challenges of our physical, information and/or communication environments. Establishing a routine commitment to engaging a variety of user experts who can offer insights into what fails and what works is a reliable means of continuous improvement.
* Coordinate and integrate a vision of inclusion throughout the entire organization. A shared sense of purpose infects the entire organization and shapes priorities, and inclusion is woven into everything the organization does – marketing, planning, budgeting, fundraising and branding.
* Innovate. Creating great places and experiences that work for everyone is inspired, creative, collegial, satisfying, and fun. Fresh ideas come from fresh insights and a willingness to engage in trial and error.

**Innovation & Learning Network**

The Innovation and Learning Network (ILN) provides organizations with the opportunity for experiential, collaborative learning, and program development. Based on a model of community practice, the ILN will bring together organizations with shared interests and similar challenges to learn from each other over the course of a year.

Over the course of the ILN participants will:

* Develop an initiative to increase participation focused on inclusion, accessibility, or universal design.
* Define objectives of the initiative and identify measurable ways of tracking progress and defining success.

At the conclusion of the ILN, participants will be ready to implement their initiative.