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Power of culture

UNOFFICIAL DRAFT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE AT ITS NEXT MEETING

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Executive Committee Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Cecil Barron Jensen
Simone Early
Julie Wake

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
Carolyn Cole, Special Projects Manager for Advancement
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:03am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement. He then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the three sets of minutes included in their meeting materials and if they had he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Julie Wake moved to approve the minutes; Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Iván Espinoza-Madrigal was absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee affirms its prior approval of the executive session minutes of the February 25, 2025 Executive Committee (previously approved in executive session on April 16, 2025) Meeting in the form

Prepared on 12/5/25

presented.

RESOLVED: the Executive Committee approves the executive session minutes of the April 16, 2025 Executive Committee Meeting in the form presented.

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee approves the minutes of the August 6, 2025 Executive Committee Meeting in the form presented.

The Chair then shared that he had nothing pressing to report, though he expressed his excitement to see everyone next week at the Council Meeting at the Agency offices on October 29. He then turned the meeting over to Michael Bobbitt for the Executive Director's report.

Michael reflected on the past two months, noting that September and October had flown by and that it had been one of the busiest and most productive periods since he joined. He highlighted the opening of numerous grant opportunities and various convenings. Michael reminded Council members to review the monthly report prepared by Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon and encouraged them to reach out with questions or to join upcoming events, expressing appreciation for their participation. Among the highlights, he mentioned his keynote address at the OneCape Summit in Harwich, joining Julie Wake for a panel, and Dave's attendance at several events, including the STEM Week Kickoff and the Mass Humanities Board Meeting.

Michael joined by staff visited the Berkshire Museum at Senator Paul Mark's invitation, met with MassDOT Secretary Monical Tibbits-Nutt and MOTT Executive Director Kate Fox, and reached out to newly appointed Secretary of Economic Development Eric Paley to explore collaboration opportunities. In the last ten days, Michael had three speaking engagements in three different cities, including at the American Society of Landscape Architects Conference in New Orleans, the Creating Healthy Communities Annual Conference at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, and at Yale University's Cultural Innovation Lab.

He also acknowledged advancement staff Erik Holmgren and Carolyn Cole for their work stewarding new partnerships with MassChallenge, MassHealth, the Executive Office of Economic Development, and other initiatives, noting that these efforts have already leveraged approximately \$2 million going to the cultural sector through funding and services. Michael also highlighted potential new partners, including municipal health plans, DCAMM, MassHire, and Commonwealth Corporation, emphasizing how these partnerships position Massachusetts as a national leader in creativity-led problem solving. Michael noted the October 31st "Degrees of Change" convening co-hosted with BU as the first in a two-part series designed to enhance public and private sector leadership, improve graduate outcomes, and strengthen business and political acumen among arts graduates. He also noted that later today the Programs Committee will receive an overview of the revisions the Agency is making to the Cultural Districts Initiative. Michael concluded by thanking the Council for their support and expressing excitement to see them in person next week.

Marc thanked Michael and asked whether it would be possible to attend portions of the Higher Education Summit without committing to the entire day. Michael confirmed that would be fine and explained that the summit would begin with a welcome and an overview of the data asset inventory and information about graduates with arts

degrees, followed by testimony from those who have incorporated business acumen into their curricula, and then a session on political engagement.

Marc then turned the meeting over to Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her Public Affairs update. Bethann reported a busy period with legislative activity, including public hearings on topics of concern to the Council. She noted that this week is Massachusetts STEM Week and highlighted the Agency's advocacy efforts to rebrand STEM to STEAM. She described her attendance at the public hearing for the Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) technical correction bill and expressed optimism that the initiatives would move forward with committee recommendations. Bethann also highlighted Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development Committee hearings and submissions on the MassCreative Creative Space and Place Acts, the LCC proposal allowing small-town LCC members to serve three consecutive terms, and a new campaign Mass Cultural Council has launched to celebrate new grantees. She mentioned the Governor's new Competitiveness Council as an opportunity to advocate for creative sector representation and noted ongoing regional grant celebrations, with additional events planned for fall and spring.

Julie asked for clarification on the CFF technical correction. Bethann explained that it pertains to ensuring equitable eligibility for cultural facilities, including tribal, cultural, and municipal organizations, by striking outdated language. Dave added context that the size and age limits were originally intended to fit some very specific projects but over time we have realized it makes sense to include all municipal cultural facilities as well as tribal government cultural facilities. Bethann further clarified that the policy change was prompted by an example of a small town in Western Massachusetts whose project had previously been deemed ineligible. Marc thanked Bethann for the clarification.

He then asked Michael and Dave to provide an update on the Strategic Plan extension. Michael explained that staff is recommending extending the current plan through 2028 to operationalize ongoing work. Dave added that the last three pages of the plan included in the Committee's meeting materials highlighted achievements under the existing strategic plan over the past 2.5 years. Marc confirmed that the areas marked in red were suggested updates. Michael explained that part of the extension includes implementing the current plan by creating a "Creative Massachusetts 2035 plan", which is a forward-looking approach to long-term economic impact, government interventions, and sector development. The Council discussed the importance of scenario planning, considering future interventions, and incorporating private sector partnerships. Julie and Jo-Ann emphasized the need for flexibility given rapid changes, including potential impacts from AI, and suggested incorporating metrics and benchmarks for monitoring progress. The group agreed to dedicate significant discussion time at the next Council Meeting and vote on the extension at a future after that discussion, allowing full Council input and feedback. Dave noted that an extension of the status quo with minor tweaks would still allow the Council to engage in deeper conversation. Marc re-confirmed that the discussion would be prioritized at the Council Meeting and that we would put off a vote on the plan today.

Marc then turned to Chief Financial Officer Cathy Cheng-Anderson for a Business Operations update. Cathy reported that the Agency originally planned to allocate \$55,000 each in National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) federal funds to the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), and the Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute however each organization notified us about concerns about accepting

federal funding from the current administration. Cathy clarified that this approach of administratively assigning larger federal awards to organizations capable of meeting compliance requirements aligns with the Agency's historical practice. She added that the majority of organizations receiving federal funding are already under contract and that only the three she mentioned raised concerns about compliance. Jo-Ann confirmed her understanding of the situation, and the Committee discussed alternative options for reallocating funds if necessary, noting that any unaccepted funds could be reassigned to other eligible organizations or replaced with state funding. The total reallocation discussed was \$165,000.

The Committee then reviewed a \$325 travel request for Michael Bobbitt to attend and moderate a panel at the Capacity Interactive Boot Camp conference in New York City in November. The majority of his costs are covered by Capacity Interactive, the \$325 is to cover remaining costs such as transportation to and from Amtrak stations and meals. Michael explained that the convening would include finance experts from government, the for-profit sector, and social impact organizations to discuss strategic investment in arts organizations. The motion to approve the travel request was made by Ché, seconded by Cecil. By roll call vote and noting that Iván Espinoza-Madriral was absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve \$325 to cover Michael Bobbitt's expenses pertaining to his participation in the Capacity Interactive Bootcamp conference.

Marc then opened discussion on the Agency's travel policy. Ché noted that while the sector is facing complex challenges, reviewing small travel expenditures of a few hundred dollars at each meeting might be inefficient. Julie agreed that discussion of minor travel amounts was unnecessary. The Committee discussed options for setting an annual or per-trip threshold, reviewing past best practices, and implementing accountability measures without micromanaging operational details. Michael noted that staff already track travel and spending. Simone emphasized that internal financial review processes provide sufficient oversight. The Committee agreed to present the issue to full Council as an open discussion at their meeting on October 29th. Cathy noted that under the current policy, any overage within a budget line exceeding ten percent must be reported to the Chair and approved by the Council. Simone questioned whether, then, the travel policy was still necessary. Marc suggested reviewing the threshold and parameters with full Council. The Committee discussed updating the policy with a placeholder for the threshold. It was agreed to leave the existing policy as-is for discussion at the Council Meeting on October 29th.

Dave asked the Committee where the item should appear on the upcoming Council Meeting agenda, and it was decided that travel policy would remain as item 7B, just before the break, with the only change being the addition of a broadly framed discussion item titled "Travel Policy Discussion." The Strategic Plan item would remain on the agenda without an anticipated vote. Marc asked for a motion to approve the draft agenda as amended. Cecil moved, Julie seconded, and by roll call noting that Iván Espinoza-Madriral was absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the draft agenda for the 167th Meeting of Mass Cultural Meeting on October 29, as amended.

Marc adjourned the meeting at 11:54 a.m.