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Corrected 10.23

COUNCIL MEETING BOOK

**ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-SEVENTH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2025

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**ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-SEVENTH MEETING
OF MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2025
12:00 – 3:00 PM**

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL OFFICE
10 SAINT JAMES AVENUE, 3rd FLOOR
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

NOTE: THIS IS AN OPEN PUBLIC MEETING AT THE ADDRESS NOTED ABOVE

AND WILL NOT BE LIVESTREAMED

MEETING MATERIALS WILL BE POSTED ONLINE AT
[HTTPS://MASSCULTURALCOUNCIL.ORG/ABOUT/BOARD/](https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/board/)

Under "October 29, 2025, Council Meeting"

AGENDA

VOTE

-
- 1. Call to Order – Open Meeting Law Notice
 - 2. Guest Speaker- Open Door Arts
 - 3. Minutes X
 - 3a. Minutes of the 166th Meeting of Mass Cultural Council - August 19, 2025
 - 4. Chair Report

5. Executive Office Report

- 5a. Executive Director Report
- 5b. Advancement Update
- 5c. Equity progress report

6. Public Affairs Report

- 6a. Legislative Update
- 6b. Upcoming Events
- 6c. Outreach to Legislators and Public Officials

7. Business Operations Report

- 7a. Federal Funds
- 7b. Travel Approvals
- 7c. Travel Policy Updates Discussion

[10-minute Break]

8. Extension and Update of Strategic Plan

9. Programs Report

10. Conflicts of Interest

11. Additional FY26 Grant Recommendations

X

- 11a. Arts & Health
- 11b. MassChallenge
- 11c. Clarification on the ability to award unused approved grant funds

12. Adjourn



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2025

RESOLUTIONS

Section 3- Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Sixty-Sixth Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council in the form presented.

Section 11(a)- Arts & Health

RESOLVED: To approve the Social Prescription: NEA Arts & Health Grants in the amount of \$75,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee.

Section 11(b)- Creative Advantage

RESOLVED: To approve a Creative Advantage grant to Mass Challenge of \$25,000, as recommended by the Programs Committee.

Section 11(c)-Reallocation of Unused Approved Funds

RESOLVED: To approve the ability of staff to re-allocate unused approved grant funds for any program to other grant applicants who would have been next eligible for such funds under such program or any other FY 26 recommended program as recommended by the Programs Committee.



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

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-SIXTY SIXTH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Thomas Bernard
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
Cecil Barron Jensen
David S. Kong
Anika Lopes
Diane Asadorian Masters
Allyce Najimy
Ashley Occhino
Ellice Patterson
Mark Snyder
Julie Wake

Also Present were guest speakers Jenny Larios Berlin and Ben Shields from the MIT Sloan School of Management and Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Christian Kelly, Sara Glidden and Erik Holmgren

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 9:04 am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement. After David read the statement, the Chair welcomed Council Members, staff, and guests to the meeting. Marc noted that the Council had heard at previous meetings that Michael and the team have been working to develop an arts entrepreneurship program in collaboration with the Sloan School of Management at MIT, so that joining the meeting today to tell us more about this collaboration are Jenny Larios Berlin, Lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management and Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Trust Center for MIT

Prepared on 9/12/25

Entrepreneurship and Ben Shields, Senior Lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management. Marc invited Jenny to begin their presentation.

Jenny began by noting that the team at MIT believed the language of arts was based on compassion and human understanding but also recognized that creators need financial support and understanding in order to follow and fulfill their talent. She thanked Michael for coming to them and talking and working through the idea of a course designed to support artists from a business perspective.

Other fields (namely science) need translation of ideas and concepts in order to further their work- foundations and investors won't fund ideas unless they understand them. The same is true of creative producers. They need a bridge from talent and concept to commercialization/financial support in the same way as scientists. That's what this course was designed for.

The question we raised was "what can we do to close the gap between talent and financing for creative individuals?" How can we empower creative people to live off and benefit from their talent? How can we bring what we've learned of business development to the creative sector? Jenny then introduced Ben to continue the presentation.

Ben thanked Jenny for discussing the *why* behind the MITx Arts & Entrepreneurship class and he was now going to discuss the *how*. Ben explained that they had worked directly with practicing artists to pull this course together so that the creative entrepreneur mindset would be at the center of the course. After thanking Michael again for his thought partnership, Ben presented the August 2025 visual pitch deck for the MIT Arts Entrepreneurship program (in the form of a PowerPoint presentation which is available upon request). Ben noted that the class is asynchronous and free but there would be an opportunity to obtain for a nominal \$25-50 cost an official certificate of completion from MITx. Ben noted that maybe there could be a waiver of that for people that came in through Mass Cultural Council.

At the end of the slide deck, Marc thanked Jenny and Ben, commenting that this seemed to be a such a helpful course and potentially a game-changer for the sector. And then asked for questions and comments from the Council.

Ashley Occhino asked if there was a cap on the number of participants, Ben said no – it was free and unlimited and designed for scale. Michael stated that he hoped there would be "book club" type group learnings where everyone could attend the course together on their phones.

Simone Early offered that she believed this was a great idea but wondered how they would determine whether students came in through Mass Cultural Council in terms of the certificate fee waiver. Ben said it's an option they are thinking about, and the logistics would need to be worked out.

David Kong mentioned he was a fellow MIT educator (from MIT Media Lab), congratulated his colleagues and stated he thought this was a wonderful course and asked about the "pure learning" piece versus the relational and community-building aspects. Ben replied that community was an important part of the course design. Peer assessment is a key component of any scaled class.

Mark Snyder was very impressed by the idea and felt that creatives and artists could benefit by learning more public relations and marketing skills.

Allyce Najimy asked if budgeting was a skill that was being taught in the course and would there possibly be a capstone project which could be a large showcase- a sort of Shark Tank type event?

Jenny indicated there will be a full module on budgeting and as part of the course there will be opportunities for share-outs in small groups. Haven't really thought how a large event would work with a course of this nature- would probably need additional funders for that.

Allyce mentioned a UMass sports marketing course with a Shark Tank type event and offered to share information.

Anika Lopes weighed in and shared she was also very excited about this opportunity and further added that she thought a Shark Tank type experience could "up the ante" a little.

Michael stated that we hoped thousands of artists would take advantage of this evergreen course so a specific event could be difficult. Jenny noted that they were running it initially as specific course in specific semester, but it would hopefully have a substantial enrollment.

Michael added how important it was that artists had been involved in the course design and that he believed that it would help with the translation of business terms in ways artists could appreciate. Michael noted there is often an "anti-commercialization" undercurrent in the creative sector and that he hopes this effort to join artistic creativity and entrepreneurship together with political power can overcome some of that.

Marc asked if people who may not have retained the knowledge from a particular session, was there a way to go back and relearn? Jenny indicated that the AI-embedded copilot could help with this, and Ben stated that students could continue to access the course materials even after the course had ended.

Ellice Patterson asked if there is any way for the artist/students to connect to the larger MIT network and maybe to a pipeline for larger opportunities. Jenny noted that this was an important point- the course will focus on how to identify potential resources and will focus in part on a specific activity the student is currently undertaking and yes there will be references throughout to other available MITx courses on business and entrepreneurship.

Marc said there appear to be no further questions and with a big reminder to everyone that this course is FREE, he thanked Jenny and Ben for their illuminating presentation and Michael and the staff for developing this project.

Marc then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the 165th Council Meeting & the April 22, 2025 Special Meeting of the Council included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve the minutes.

After motion made and duly seconded, by roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin Donna Haghghat and Rhonda Anderson were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Sixty-Fifth Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council and the Special meeting of Mass Cultural Council held on April 22, 2025, all in the form presented .

Marc gave his Chair's report and began by introducing newly-appointed Council Member Tom Bernard. He asked Tom to introduce himself and Tom stated it was an honor to be appointed to the Council and that he had had a full orientation session from the staff earlier this month and he was inspired by the opening presentation by MITx and felt inspired by this the commitment to artists and the cultural sector that this initiative showed. Tom mentioned that he appreciated the arts, having worked at Mass MoCA more than 20 years ago and later as Mayor of North Adams was very familiar with the value of the arts. He strongly believed in the concept of regional equity and looked forward to representing the Berkshires.

Marc thanked Tom and mentioned that we have a stacked agenda today so would keep his report brief. The Executive Committee met on August 6 and was joined by a representative of DCAMM to discuss the Council's 5-year lease extension at its current location. He also mentioned that a few weeks earlier, he had met with the chairs of the California and New York arts agencies as part of a peer networking effort. He thought there should be more chairs talking to each other across state lines. He noted that Mass Cultural Council is well-respected nationally and that Massachusetts has a strong sector and strong staff who provide us with so much useful and necessary information. Hats off to Michael and the leadership team and the entire staff. Marc will continue to reach out to chairs around the nation.

Marc then noted he had recently seen Michael had been published for his stage adaptation of Make Way For Ducklings and offered his congratulations. Michael described his history with the play and the McCloskey family.

Marc concluded by referencing the upcoming calendar of meetings in the Council materials and lists of Committee assignments. He noted Tom would be assigned to a Committee shortly. He then asked Michael for the Executive Director report.

Michael stated that most of his report will be in the spending plan presentation later in the meeting but noted it has been a very productive summer for the agency. He reminded the Council that Ann Petruccelli Moon sends out monthly updates as to meetings he and/or Dave attended or will attend, and members should let us know if they want to know more or join. This is part of our ongoing plan to build and establish relationships across state government and other parts of the economy. We welcome any connections members have and would be willing to suggest or make introductions. Michael extended a warm welcome to Tom as a new council member. He stated that the agency has achieved all our goals under the current strategic plan so far. Michael referred to advancement activities (and to the Advancement Committee report included with the meeting materials), recognized the efforts of the new advancement team under Erik Holmgren and Carolyn Cole noted that creativity was connected to all parts of civic life. In the upcoming year, we will seek to turn the many connections we've established into objectives and goals,

Marc thanked Michael for his report and asked Bethann Steiner for the Public Affairs report.

Bethann noted that the recently enacted state budget had provided the agency with its largest appropriation ever. This summer, the agency has been asked to weigh in on current affairs- including a state house hearing about loss of federal funding in the arts and also at a webinar hosted by the Healey Administration's Federal Funds Information Office on the same topic. As we get closer to the end of the summer, there may be more hearings we are asked to participate in. Bethann extended her thanks to the Public Affairs team (Dawn Heinen and Christian Kelly) for working to rebuild the Agency's website with the new FY26 programs which the Council will be voting on later today. The team has also developed a new "Programs At A Glance" brochure which will be published after this meeting. There is also a new page on the website dedicated to Advancement and members are encouraged to visit and check it out. A big thanks to all members who have been attending our convenings and events. In this new fiscal year, we are restarting that effort, though this year we will focus on regional events as opposed to specific program-related events. These events will occur this fall and next spring.

Marc moved to the next item on the agenda and asked Michael to introduce the presentation on Mass Cultural Council's FY26 spending plan. Michael – joined by Jen Lawless and Catherine Cheng-Anderson – then presented an in-depth slide deck outlining the Agency's spending plan for the new fiscal year. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Marc thanked the staff at the end of the presentation

There were no further comments or questions for Michael, Jen, or Catherine and Marc asked Dave to review the Conflict-of-Interest procedures for FY26.

Dave explained that under state ethics law Council Members may not take official action pertaining to any organization in which they have a financial interest, employment, or board membership; and, rather than leaving the room for the vote on grant recommendations, their conflicts of interest are disclosed in the minutes, and this indicates that they take no part in the discussion or the vote on funding for any of those identified organizations. He asked Council Members to review conflicts of interest list in their materials and indicate if there are any updates and several members updated their disclosures. Tom Bernard disclosed he was affiliated with Northern Berkshire Community Coalition. Julie Wake also indicated she had a connection to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Dave said he would add both items to the conflicts list for purposes of the upcoming votes and he would send around an updated list right after the meeting.

Marc then moved to the next agenda item and asked Jen for the Programs update. Jen referred to the materials circulated and asked if there were questions. There were none and Marc then asked the Programs Committee to report on the FY26 Program recommendations. Julie as Co-Chair of the Programs Committee reported that they had reviewed and recommended the Program recommendations contained in the meeting materials.

Marc asked if there were any questions and there being none moved on to FY26 Spending Plan approval. Marc mentioned the Executive Committee had reviewed and recommended the proposed FY26 Spending Plan contained in the meeting materials and asked Catherine for her presentation.

Catherine referred to the materials which had been circulated and asked if there were any questions. There being none, Marc asked for a vote of the FY 26 Spending Plan and Program Recommendations. Upon motion duly made and seconded, by roll call vote and noting that Petrina Martin, Donn Haghghat and Rhonda Anderson were absent, the Council approved the following

WHEREAS, the General Court of the Massachusetts State Legislature has appropriated, and the Governor has signed into law, a budget of \$26,045,152 plus an additional \$930,000 in earmarks to the Mass Cultural Council for FY26;

WHEREAS Mass Cultural Council staff has presented a draft FY26 budget and spending plan to the Executive Committee at its meeting on August 6, 2025 (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 19, 2025 (the "Council 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 FY26 grants recommendations to the Programs Committee at its meeting on August 6, 2025 ("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

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council a grant to Mass Humanities totaling \$983,056 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to NEFA of \$70,000, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to Mass Creative for \$30,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to MassPort for \$5,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve Mass Cultural Council implementation of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)-funded Arts & Health Project in the amount of \$75,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a Mass Cultural Council grant to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (or related entity) for \$10,000 for the MITx Arts Entrepreneurship Online Program as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To endorse the approach by staff to provide \$7,200,000 in unrestricted operating support grant to cultural organizations under both the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and new Operating Grants for Organizations as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$870,000 in Cultural District grants as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To make allocations to the Local Cultural Councils totaling \$5,700,000 as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve up to \$103,950 in allocations to Tribal Cultural Councils as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve grant allocations to YouthReach program in the amount of \$1,870,000, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a grant of \$36,000 to the Youth Arts Impact Network with EdVestors and \$25,000 in support of the NEA-funded Poetry Out Loud program as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve the Creative Experiences program grants totaling \$3,350,000 and an additional \$25,000 from the NEA for program applicants focusing on "America 250," as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve \$465,000 in UP Innovation Fund Grants, as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

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.

RESOLVED: To approve the ability of staff to re-allocate unused grant funds for any program to any other FY26 approved grant program (whether approved at this meeting or a future FY26 Council meeting) as recommended by the Programs Committee and presented at the Council Meeting.

The following Council Members abstained from voting and/or discussing grants pertaining to the organizations listed under their name:

Marc Carroll

- a. Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
- b. The Rivers School

Jo-Ann Davis

- a. The Care Center
- b. Springfield Museums
- c. MASSCreative

Cecil Barron Jensen

- a. Artists Association of Nantucket
- b. Egan Maritime Institute
- c. Nantucket Cultural District

Che Anderson

- a. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
- b. Worcester Historical Museum
- c. Worcester Art Museum
- d. Institute of Contemporary Art

Ivan Espinosa-Madrigal

- a. New England Foundation for the Arts
- b. Institute of Contemporary Art
- c. Lawyers for Civil Rights

Julie Wake

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

Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

Anika Lopes

- a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation

Ashley Occhino

- a. Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition/One South Coast Chamber Foundation
- b. Southeastern Massachusetts Visitors Bureau
- c. SouthCoast Community Foundation
- d. Textile Society of America

Tom Bernard

- a. Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

Marc congratulated all and asked Catherine for the Business Operations report.

Catherine referred to the materials that had been circulated to the Council. She highlighted two items. As Marc had stated, we were in process of extending our current lease at 10 Saint James Avenue (which expires in January) for another 5 years. While the rent has increased by \$2.31 per square foot, as the DCAMM representative notes at the Executive Committee meeting, this is a very favorable deal in today's market. Secondly, Catherine noted that at the August 6 meeting, the Executive Committee had approved approximately \$8900 in staff out of state travel. Details are available in the meeting materials

There were no further comments or questions. Marc, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at approximate 10:45.



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EXECUTIVE OFFICE UPDATE

OCTOBER 2025

Activities Report. On Thursday, October 2, Deputy Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon shared the October Executive Department Update detailing activities during the previous month. Please look for the next monthly update in early November.

Conferences & Engagements. As noted in the Travel Approval in section 7b of the materials for today's meetings, Executive Director Michael will travel to the following event.

[Capacity Interactive's Boot Camp 2025](#)

Brooklyn, NY
November 6-7, 2025

Michael has been invited to lead a panel discussion at the event on the current state of arts funding, bringing the perspectives of government organizations, foundations, and corporations together in dialogue about how they can move forward productively together. The Boot Camp is a conference 100% focused on arts and culture, with the goal of helping arts administrators build a holistic foundation to become stronger marketers, champions, and advocates for themselves.

Executive Committee. The Executive Committee met on October 22 to discuss a proposed extension and update of the Agency's Strategic Plan included in Section 8 of the agenda for today's meeting, approved out-of-state travel for staff members, discussed the Out of State Travel Policy listed on Section 7c of the agenda for today's meeting and approved the agenda for today's Council Meeting.

Programs Committee. The Programs Committee also met on October 22 and recommended for approval to the full Council, the grant and program recommendations made by staff which are included in Section 11 of the agenda for today's meeting,

Advancement Committee. The Advancement Committee met on October 8 and received an update on staff's advancement activities which will be summarized at today's meeting.

Conflicts of Interest. Deputy Director Dave Slatery has asked all Council members to review any potential conflicts of interest and/or connections with any of the four proposed grantees listed in Section 11 of today's meeting materials.

A reminder that all Committee meeting materials (as well as all Council Meeting materials) are posted and available for review at our website's Council page at [Governing Council – Mass Cultural Council](#).

Culture counts



Mass
Cultural
Council

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NaDaizja Bolling

Photo by Lauren Miller

Measurable Progress



Apollinaire Theatre, Chelsea.

Through partnerships with:

- Two insurance providers
- Private family clinics
- New Philanthropic Partners
- The Department of Public Health
- The Opioid Relief Fund
- The Executive Office of Economic Development
- MassPort

Mass Cultural Council has brought approximately \$2 million of new funding into our sector, and it's growing quickly...

Measurable Progress

3



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

Creative Advantage connects the entrepreneurial ecosystem in MA with Artists to demonstrate the interdependent relationship.

The NEA awarded Mass Cultural Council \$75K in additional funds for Arts Prescription, which we are recommending for three FQHC's.

Brockton (and Salem) are in talks to deploy the first Arts Wellness program in the Commonwealth.



Degrees of Change

4

On October 31st the Mass Cultural Council and Boston University will host a dynamic half-day convening that will be the first in a two-part series.

We will be joined by Executive leaders from the public and private sector who are invested in improving graduate outcomes in business acumen and political advocacy skills for students.

Housing

Mass Housing has approached us to partner with them to produce a state-wide conference in June focused on the arts as a vehicle for healing and community in their financed residential locations

Workforce Development

Partnering with the Executive Office of Labor and the Commonwealth Corporation to make workforce development funds visible and accessible to our field

Policy

5

STEM to STEAM Bill: On September 16th Bethann testified about three technical changes to the existing STEM law to change the language to STEAM. It is a change that has no cost and no implication for spending but does need constituent support.

Percent for Art: As part of our outreach to other sectors, we have met with three different state agencies (DCAMM, DCR and DOT) earlier this year that potentially have some interest in establishing an in-agency "administrative" percent for art programs in the absence and/or in anticipation of legislation or executive order. We have received some ideas and comments and are working on series of proposals and will be in contact with interested parties.

Downtown Vitality: At the table with Executive Office of Economic Development and downtown interagency partners to inform guidelines and criteria for the Downtown Vitality Fund as well as considerations for other complimentary downtown support packages.

Special Projects & Partnerships



Galleries at Lynn Arts' Julie Kramer 'Underground Icons exhibit

Downtown Interagency Initiative (CDI+MDI+TDI) completed consulting project, moving forward with programmatic collaboration.

Developing a business resource webpage for creative entrepreneurs to lend to our TeamMA partnership work with EOED's Business Front Door.

Developing a climate resiliency web presence with resources for our field in collaboration with CFF.



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EQUITY PROGRESS REPORT

OCTOBER 29, 2025

EQUITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

- Public Affairs is continuing its outreach to new communities and audiences through an ongoing media partnership with Spanish-language outlet El Planeta. Through this engagement initiative we are developing original, culturally sensitive content in Spanish, and distributing it across El Planeta's channels to promote grant opportunities and convenings to their readership. A few examples:
 - [Local Cultural Council Grants](#)
 - [Tribal Cultural Council Grants](#)
 - [Grants for Creative Individuals](#)
- The Native American and Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee is meeting for the first time on November 17 at the Herring Pond Wampanoag Meetinghouse.
- The Disability Advisory Committee met twice at the end of FY25. Their first meeting of FY26 will take place online on November 5.

SECTOR EDUCATION, SERVICES & ACHIEVEMENT

- Public Affairs hosted a virtual [Spotlight Series](#) webinar with Open Door Arts in October to brief the sector about the new [Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub](#). Mass Cultural Council is a [proud sponsor](#) of the Access Hub and Open Door Arts will be our guest Mission Moment presenter during the Council's October meeting.
- To ensure applicants understand FY26 Program Guidelines and have access to program staff, Public Affairs and various Program Teams have partnered to host virtual information sessions, with both ASL interpretation and live captioning for attendees. Additionally, as in previous fiscal years, Program Guidelines are published online in both written and audio form, and staff is available to quickly respond to further accessibility or translation requests.

PROGRAMS

- We will hold a celebration of the Tribal Cultural Council program and their FY25 grantees on November 17 at the Herring Pond Wampanoag Meetinghouse

after the Native American and Indigenous People's Advisory Committee meeting. In FY26, we were pleased to announce that a 4th Tribal Cultural Council joined the program. The [Mâseepee Cultural Council](#) joined the [Aquinnah Wampanoag Cultural Council](#), the [Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe Cultural Council \(HPWTCC\)](#), and the [Nipmuc/k Cultural Council](#), offering a grant cycle in FY26.

- FY26 grantmaking continues to include an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. Programs continue to prioritize historically marginalized and under-resourced communities as we did in FY25.
- Universal Participation Office Hours take place monthly to promote access to cultural organizations across the state. Upcoming office hours include:
 - [Policy Practice & Procedures: Foundational Essentials & Quick Wins](#), November 12, 2025, 9am
 - [Building Community: Intentional Invitation](#), December 09, 2025, 9am



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PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE

OCTOBER 2025

Budget/Legislative/Advocacy Report

- Mass Cultural Council's 2 bills were scheduled for public hearings this fall, and the Agency testified in person as well as submitted written testimony.
 - H. 561, **An Act advancing Massachusetts from STEM to STEAM**, was heard by the Joint Committee on Education on September 16. The panel is due to make its recommendation by Nov. 15, 2025.
 - S. 2169, **An Act clarifying eligibility to the Massachusetts cultural facilities fund**, was heard by the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight on October 8. The panel is due to make its recommendation by Nov. 9, 2025.
 - Thank you to all Council members who submitted written testimony in support of these proposals!
- Mass Cultural Council will again partner with MASSCreative and many others to host Creative Sector Advocacy Week, which is scheduled for March 2026. The cornerstone of the week will again be a State House Day, details to be shared when event space is confirmed. Planning is now underway for this initiative.
- Mass Cultural Council kicked off the fall season and the launch of several grant programs with a State House informational materials drop. Every legislative office received a packet of materials from us in their State House office, including promotional materials, FY25 funding reports, and information on our policy agenda.

Events/Communications/Digital Communications Report

Events

Public Affairs is working to host a series of **regional grant celebrations** this fall.

- On **September 29**, we were at the Multicultural Arts Center in Cambridge to celebrate a \$6.3M investment into the Greater Boston region. Thank you to Ellice

Patterson for attending and Diane Asadorian Masters for giving remarks on behalf of the Council.

- On **October 6**, we were at the Spire Center for Performing Arts in Plymouth to celebrate a nearly \$714K investment into Plymouth County. Thank you to Mark Snyder for giving remarks on behalf of the Council.

We have three more events coming up later this fall. We hope you will register to join us at any event that is close to you!

- On **October 27**, we will be at the Cummington Community House in the Cummington Cultural District to celebrate investments into Franklin & Hampshire Counties
- On **November 3**, we will be at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis to celebrate our Cape & Islands investments.
- On **December 1**, we will be at the Hopkinton Center for the Arts to celebrate our investments in the MetroWest.

We'll continue our series of events in the spring, with events in Berkshire County, Hampden County, Worcester County, Bristol County, and Northeastern MA. Please be on the lookout for future communication from Bethann Steiner about these events as they're scheduled.

We also continue to offer the **Spotlight Series** webinars, highlighting opportunities and resources that may be of interest to the cultural sector:

- On **October 8**, we hosted Open Door Arts to provide an overview of the new Arts & Culture Accessibility Hub

Media/Community Relations

Mass Cultural Council in the news:

- **Creative Haverhill, Nevins Library Receive State Grants to Help Pay Operating Costs** (WHAU, September 30, 2025)
- **Asian American Ballet Award** (SAMPAN, September 19, 2025)
- **Roots Rising's Farm and Education Center taking shape off Barker Road in Pittsfield** (Berkshire Eagle, September 11, 2025)
- **Medway Group Benefits from New Mass Cultural Council Awards** (Franklin Observer, September 9, 2025)
- **Milford, MA High School Awarded grant for jewelry, metalsmithing courses** (MetroWest Daily News, September 9, 2025)
- **New Bedford leads the way in local arts funding. How the city supports its artists.** (SouthCoast TODAY, August 18, 2025)

As a reminder, we regularly issue press releases 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 FY26 activities, including:

- **Programs At-a-Glance**
- **Program guidelines** (Local Cultural Councils (LCC), Tribal Cultural Councils (TCC), Grants for Creative Individuals, Social Prescription, UP Innovation Fund, Cultural District Investment Grants, and Cultural Facilities Fund)
- **Grant announcements/Funding lists** (LCC & TCC Allocations, Creative Experiences, Operating Grants for Organizations, Cultural Investment Portfolio, and YouthReach)
- New advancement resource: [Creative Community & Economic Development Resource Guide](#)

BLOG

Published 21 [blog posts](#) in the last 2 months, in partnership with Program staff, to amplify and document the Agency's work.

VIDEO

- Produced a new [motion graphic](#) to promote our Grants for Creative Individuals

CAMPAIGNS & SOCIAL MEDIA

Continuing our campaign to celebrate the [LCC 45th Anniversary](#)

- New branded 'mark'
- [Blog post](#)
- [Social media mentions](#)
- [Nano interviews with LCC members](#)

Launched campaign to honor **first-time grantees**. Tactics include:

- At events: Celebratory stickers, ED shoutouts, photobooth selfie frame
- On social media: new graphics, celebratory posts and stories
- Via email: Toolkit/email for first-time grantees to use

Continuing **Staff Spotlight** social media campaign to introduce our new staff member [Allie Rosenthal](#).

MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS

The FY26 media partnership promoting our grant opportunities and events with El Planeta Media has started. This partnership includes articles, social media graphics & videos, and newsletter mentions. A few examples:

- **Greater Boston Grants Celebration**
- **Local Cultural Council Grants**
- **Tribal Cultural Council Grants**
- **Grants for Creative Individuals**

All other grant programs will be promoted during their application periods.



Power of culture

BUSINESS OPERATIONS UPDATE

OCTOBER 29, 2025

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER UPDATE

1. Mass Cultural Council was awarded \$1.3M from the NEA in FY26, which must be matched with an additional \$1.3 million from our state allocation. Recipients of these \$2.6 million federal funds or match funds will be subject to additional federal requirements to which other grantees are not subject. Historically, staff have administratively selected which approved grantees will receive federal or match funds based upon criteria discussed below.

To date, we have notified all proposed grantees of the federal and match funds, and three organizations have raised concerns with accepting federal funds under the current federal administration. The Museum of Fine Arts (\$55,000), the Institute of Contemporary Arts (\$55,000), and the Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute (\$55,000). These larger institutions were selected for federal funds because they have the infrastructure, staffing, and systems to successfully intake and manage federal grants and meet additional federal requirements, a capacity that can be more challenging for smaller organizations. Additionally, each of these grantees has previously received and successfully administered NEA funds through the Agency.

Among these institutions, the responses have varied. One organization has asked how Mass Cultural Council would support them legally should they decide to accept federal funding, while the others have indicated a stronger inclination to decline federal support. Our approach to address these concerns will be to honor an organization's decision to ultimately decline federal funds and transition them to state support only if we are able to reassign their federal allocation to another eligible organization willing to accept those funds. In these cases, the grant will be placed on hold until the reassignment is secured. If we are unable to identify an alternate recipient among the already-approved grantees, the organization's decision to decline may need to be accepted, and the funds reallocated to the next eligible organization on our grants list willing to accept the federal funding.

2. We have submitted our FY27 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 \$1.3 million in funding for FY27.

3. On December 10, 2024, the Office of the State Auditor notified us of its intent to conduct a Performance Audit Update of Mass Cultural Council. Since that time, we have held weekly meetings with the audit team and have provided the requested Excel files, documents, screenshots, and supporting materials. The auditors are currently reviewing the submitted materials. There are no significant updates to report at this time, and we will keep the Council informed.
4. Cathy Cheng-Anderson, recently approved by the executive committee, attended the Strategic Human Resources Conference in Carroll, NH. This conference provided a valuable training opportunity for human resources executives, focusing on best practices for effective human resources leadership. The conference addressed pressing topics, such as artificial intelligence, leading change within organizations, strengthening employee relations, managing diverse and multigenerational workforces, and planning for succession.

SPENDING HIGHLIGHTS

1. We are about four months into the fiscal year, and our spending remains on target or slightly below projections across most areas. Spending typically lags in the first half of the year due to the time required to set up contracts, pay out grants, and initiate services/projects. As contracts are finalized and projects are advanced, we anticipate a steady increase in spending, aligning with our projections for the latter part of the fiscal year.
2. **Core Appropriation Summary:** This summary provides a comparison between Council-approved budget allocations and actual expenses as of October 15, 2025.

Total Council Approved Budget Allocations:	26,975,152
Total Expenses as of 10/15/25:	2,487,408

EXPENSES	STATE FUNDING	EXPENSES AS OF 10/15/25	% OF BUDGET EXPENDED	SPENDING PROJECTIONS 10/15/25
AA: SALARY	4,323,243	1,189,039	28%	4,323,243
BB: EMPLOYEE REIMBURSEMENT	96,739	13,879	14%	96,739
CC: CONTRACT STAFF	-			-
DD: PAYROLL TAX AND FRINGE	95,544	22,378	23%	95,544
EE: ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	153,383	18,699	12%	153,383
GG: RENT AND ELECTRICITY	333,565	112,323	34%	333,565
HH: CONSULTING SERVICES	251,750	4,100	2%	251,750
JJ: PROGRAMMATIC SERVICES	197,096	1,968	1%	197,096
KK: NON-IT EQUIPMENT	5,000	-	0%	5,000
LL: LEASES	13,299	2,158	16%	13,299
PP: GRANTS PROGRAMS	20,225,573	1,042,500	5%	20,225,573
PP: LEGISLATIVE EARMARKS	930,000	-	-	930,000
UU: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	349,961	80,365	23%	349,961
TOTAL EXPENSES	26,975,152	2,487,408	9%	26,975,152

3. **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 15, 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 2025.
4. **Reference Material:** FY26 Approved Spending Plan Documents are [linked](#) for reference purposes.



Power of culture

To: Mass Cultural Council
 From: Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director
 David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
 Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
 Date: October 22, 2025
 Re: **Out-of-State Travel**

Under the Mass Cultural Council's Out-of-State Travel Policy, any staff travel outside Massachusetts must receive prior approval from the Executive Committee. Travel within New England—Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Connecticut—is not considered out-of-state unless it involves airfare, overnight lodging, or registration fees over \$800.

The travel requests outlined below total \$325. Michael's request provides clear public benefit, supports the employees' core job duties, aligns with the Council's mission, Strategic Plan, and Equity Plan, and represents a cost-effective use of resources. All required Travel Authorization Forms, Procurement Request Forms, and State Ethics disclosures are on file.

[Capacity Interactive's Boot Camp 2025](#) 11/6 and 11/7 in Brooklyn, NY.

Executive Director Michael Bobbitt has been invited to serve as a panelist at Capacity Interactive's *Boot Camp 2025*, participating in a discussion on the current state of arts funding. The session will bring together voices from government, foundations, and corporations to explore how these sectors can collaborate more effectively to strengthen the arts ecosystem.

Boot Camp is a national conference devoted entirely to arts and culture, designed to help arts administrators become stronger marketers, champions, and advocates for their organizations. Its mission aligns closely with Mass Cultural Council's strategic plan and advancement goals.

There is no registration cost for the event, as Michael is a featured presenter. Capacity Interactive will contribute \$1,000 toward lodging and travel expenses. The Agency will cover the remaining estimated cost of \$325.



Power of culture

STRATEGIC PLAN EXTENSION

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Catherine Cheng-Anderson
Dt: October 22, 2025
Re: Strategic Plan Extension

Staff is proposing an extension and update of the existing Mass Cultural Council Strategic Plan for an additional two years- though the end of Fiscal Year 2028. The Executive Committee has reviewed this document and asked that it be presented to the full Council on October 29 for fuller discussion.

BACKGROUND

Mass Cultural Council adopted its current Strategic Plan in March 2023 to cover the three fiscal years from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2026 (FY24-26). The Agency has experienced and learned a great deal through the implementation of the current plan. While much has been accomplished, there is still much to do. While the Values, Vision, Mission, and core Goals of the Strategic Plan remain unchanged, staff recommends that modest refinements be made to the Plan and that it be extended through FY28.

The current Mass Cultural Council FY24-26 Strategic Plan can be found [on our website](#) and is set forth below with proposed updates and adjustments related to the extension of the plan through FY28 in **red**.

We anticipate that with the extended Plan, the Agency would next go through a comprehensive strategic planning process starting sometime in the latter half of 2027.

CURRENT PLAN

Values

The statement of what is most important to us; our non-negotiables

Creativity

Mass Cultural Council believes that creativity is the key to solving many of society's concerns and advancing this asset helps to make the Commonwealth a preeminent place in the nation for it to thrive.

Public Service

Mass Cultural Council serves the Commonwealth and all who live, work, visit, and play here by amplifying creativity, providing resources, expanding relationships, and championing transformational changes that maintain and grow a thriving creative and cultural ecosystem.

Inclusion

Mass Cultural Council works to build a diverse and equitable creative and cultural sector in the Commonwealth, ensuring that all who practice and participate in creative and cultural expression see themselves in it.

Vision

The better world we are working towards

Mass Cultural Council envisions a diverse creative and cultural sector that is valued as essential in the Commonwealth.

Mission

Our role in creating that world

Mass Cultural Council advances the Commonwealth's creative and cultural sector by celebrating traditions and talents, championing its collective needs, and equitably investing public resources.

Strategy

Mass Cultural Council's strategy is to analyze its investments (of money, time, resources, etc.) to ensure that its work and any new opportunities advance equity in the sector. Mass Cultural Council prioritizes opportunities that both advance equity and a) support transformational change via advocacy/education, and/or b) elevate, nurture, or celebrate the sector.

Goals

Our Impact

Build and support programmatic practices that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion through our services to the sector.

Our Ecosystem

Advance the creative and cultural sector through building partnerships, identifying recommendations, and storytelling, both inside and outside of the sector

Our Culture

Ensure that our internal systems, structures, and ways of working reflect our values and advance the sector's needs.

Objectives

Our Impact: Our most powerful tools for delivering on our mission.

Goal 1: Build and support programmatic practices that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion through our services to the sector

Objectives

1. Consolidate programs and services to provide a) clear and simple pathways for grantees and b) increased capacity of the agency to achieve strategic goals.
 - a. Encourage, incentivize and drive regionalization of local cultural councils and the improvement and professionalization of the Cultural Districts.
2. Increase use of data and research to strengthen programming and services.
 - a. Support climate change issues through programmatic practices and encouragement of the cultural sector to develop internal capacity.
 - b. Support and advocate for closing business acumen gaps in arts/cultural education and in the cultural sector generally.
3. Ensure accessibility, inclusivity, and equity in our grant making.

Our Ecosystem: We are both for and of the creative and cultural sector.

Goal 2: Advance the creative and cultural sector through building partnerships, identifying recommendations, and storytelling, both inside and outside of the sector

Objectives

1. Increase use of data and research to strengthen programming and services by telling the sectors' stories to decision makers and community leaders which advance awareness and integration in the Commonwealth and support for the sector
 - a. Invest resources into economic forecasting about the potential economic impact and performance of the sector given key recommended policy interventions and use such information to develop a "Creative Massachusetts 2035 Plan."
 - b. Investigate and research regions, states, and other internationally recognized robust and sustainable creative sectors and translate any knowledge gained into recommendations and or practices to be implemented in Massachusetts.
2. Build sector policy and advocacy priorities and efforts with our partners, beyond funding, to advance the sector, address the sector needs, and integrate, deepen, and expand creativity and culture everywhere in the Commonwealth
 - a. Continue working with Governor's Office/Legislature/other state agencies on identifying, developing and implementing practices and policies affecting Sector priorities- such as implementing the recommendations from Governor's Cultural Policy Development Advisory Commission.
3. Identify areas of strategic alignment and build relationships with other state agencies, networks, sectors, and organizations which can support and advance the creative and cultural sector
 - a. Specifically engage with the education sector to expand arts education policy and programming on a lifelong learning basis focusing on all aspects of education from early childhood to elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary and graduate education, creative youth development, arts and aging, lifelong learning, as well as developing and implementing a STEAM curriculum and being involved with all relevant aspects of DESE and DHE policymaking.
 - b. Develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with select state agencies (e.g., DESE, EOEEA, HHS) to establish long-term pipelines for arts, culture, and cross-sector initiatives.
4. Build immersive, intensive, and interactive education opportunities for government and civic leaders to change minds and hearts and deepen knowledge and awareness of the vast benefits of the sector beyond economic impact.

5. Enhance or update our brand to more clearly define and communicate agency identity in service to increasing our visibility and reach.
6. Use intentional storytelling, sector-wide convenings, and stewardship to galvanize, celebrate, and support the sector
 - a. Develop plans to host a largescale sector-wide and cross-sector convening, perhaps with an award component, designed to increase connection between those working in arts and culture and other economic sectors, as well as political leaders, to not only celebrate, uplift and tell the story of the sector but to enhance the perception of the creative sector as a resource and valuable participant and thought partner in other policy arenas.

Our Culture and Infrastructure: Our staff and council are a critical resource for the sector.

Goal 3: Ensure that our internal systems, structures, and ways of working reflect our values and advance the sector's needs.

This goal is ongoing and continues.

Objectives

1. Identify the agency's high level competencies, structure, and culture needed for implementation and alignment with strategic goals
2. Foster a culture of continuous improvement by a) using and b) periodically reevaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of our practices, policies, tools, and systems
3. Leverage tools and technology to streamline our work.
4. Operationalize a practice of communication and cross agency collaboration among staff and between departments as it relates to strategic goals.
5. Build a culture and internal supports which prioritize and promote staff relationship building with and outreach to all constituents (sector, partners, government and civic leaders).
6. Develop clear roles and responsibilities for governing council members that align with strategic goals.

Addendum

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS TOWARD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES UNDER MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL'S FY24-26 STRATEGIC PLAN

Outlined below are the goals and objectives of the current Strategic Plan. Under each objective is a *list of achievements to date towards that objective*.

Goal 1: Build and support programmatic practices that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion through our services to the sector.

1. Consolidate programs and services to provide a) clear and simple pathways for grantees and b) increased capacity of the agency to achieve strategic goals.

Achievements to date:

- Went from 18 grant programs to 9.
- Simplified/shortened applications.
- Moved some programmatic work to other partners better suited to do the work (i.e., Open Door Arts, Arts Pharmacy, etc.)
- Reviewed/redesigned all the programs; we are finalizing the last three now.

2. Increase use of data and research to strengthen programming and services

Achievements to date:

- Conducted and shared Cultural Asset Inventory. Using data to expand our reach and make the case for investment into the field from other sectors.
- Used data to analyze grant overlap so we could adjust our policies and reach more grantees.
- Collect and use data to track progress on our equity goals (i.e., new grantees, geographic diversity, and demographic diversity).

3. Ensure accessibility, inclusivity, and equity in our grant making

Achievements to date:

- Developed and implemented outreach and recruitment plans to increase diversity of our applicants and grantees.
- Introduced priority points to target historically underfunded individuals and organizations.

- Developed and implemented BIPOC-Centered Organization Self-Identification process.
- Working with advisory committees to identify additional areas of work to improve programs.

Goal 2: Advance the creative and cultural sector through building partnerships, identifying recommendations, and storytelling, both inside and outside of the sector.

1. Increase use of data and research to strengthen programming and services by telling the sectors' stories to decision makers and community leaders which advance awareness and integration in the Commonwealth and support for the sector.

Achievements to date:

- Mass Cultural Council released the 2024 Cultural Asset Inventory and used this new data, which quantifies the size, scope, economic impact and needs of the cultural sector to convene several in-person and remote briefings with policymakers, advocacy partners, philanthropic leaders, cross-sector partners, and arts and culture stakeholders. By sharing this new data – in writing, in briefings, and with colorful one-pagers of key datapoints broken down by state and counties – Mass Cultural Council continues to develop a narrative of the economic power, as well as the need for new and ongoing public support – for those who work in the cultural sector.
2. Build sector policy and advocacy priorities and efforts with our partners, beyond funding, to advance the sector, address the sector needs and integrate, deepen, and expand creativity and culture everywhere in the Commonwealth.

Achievements to date:

- In the 2025-2026 legislative session Mass Cultural Council developed two new bills, which are pending before the Legislature. One focuses on our goal to rebrand STEM to STEAM – embracing arts and creativity as a core educational subject and valued skill, just like science, technology, engineering, and math. The second attempts to clarify the Cultural Facilities Fund statute to ensure all municipal and tribally owned cultural facilities are eligible, regardless of size or age. Additionally, the Agency continues to monitor and advocate for bills under review by the Legislature of interest to the sector and continues to be a thought partner with other state agencies on various policy and programmatic initiatives. With the conclusion of the Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council and the filing of said recommendations with the Governor in April 2025, Mass Cultural Council stands ready to help the Administration implement the recommendations.

3. Identify areas of strategic alignment and build relationships with other state agencies, networks, sectors, and organizations which can support and advance the creative and cultural sector.

Achievements to date:

- *Mass Cultural Council built strong ties with:*
 - **State Agencies:** Executive Offices of Labor, Housing, Public Health, and Education, as well as MassPort, MassDOT, and MassHousing—advancing arts in workforce, housing, and health.
 - **Education & Workforce:** DESE, Executives across higher education, Boston University summit on arts education curricula, Tufts Field Projects proposing to work on 'Workforce Development for the Creative Economy: Building a Creative Workforce Pipeline for MA', STEM to STEAM advocacy at the Commonwealth's STEM Council.
 - **Health Sector:** Focus on arts prescriptions with clinics and insurers. National Endowment for the Arts "Arts & Health" grants, City of Franklin, the City of Brockton, in conversation with more than a dozen other municipalities on Opioid Funds.
 - **Business & Innovation:** Mass Challenge's Creative Advantage program, Main Street America, and business resource development, Associated Industries of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Restaurant and Lodging Association.
4. Build immersive, intensive, and interactive education opportunities for government and civic leaders to change minds and hearts and deepen knowledge and awareness of the vast benefits of the sector beyond economic impact.

Achievements to date:

- The Council is educating civic leaders through:
 - **Degrees of Change Summit:** A hands-on event with Boston University to boost business and advocacy skills.
 - **Policy Engagement:** STEM to STEAM testimony and Percent for Art agency outreach.
 - **Creative Platforms:** Events like the Envisioning Access Golf Tournament to reach new audiences.
 - **Narrative Shift:** Focusing on research and data-driven outcomes to promote the arts as essential to health, housing, and innovation—not just economic impact.
5. Enhance or update our brand to more clearly define and communicate agency identity in service to increasing our visibility and reach.

Achievements to date:

- Mass Cultural Council's teal and orange logo and tag line "Power Of Culture" is widely recognized by public sector and cultural sector partners and stakeholders. Continued focus on building new relationships and strategic partnerships outside of the cultural sector increases the visibility and reach of our messaging and initiatives.
6. Use intentional storytelling, sector-wide convenings, and stewardship to galvanize, celebrate, and support the sector.

Achievements to date:

- Mass Cultural Council has a robust library of digital tools, including a dynamic website, two blogs, three monthly e-newsletters, and daily engaging content on social media, which is paired with colorful and informational print materials used to celebrate and support the cultural sector. Additionally, the Agency convenes several celebrations each fiscal year – in FY26, the model is changing to large regional celebrations instead of program-by-program celebrations – and maintains media relations to foster external attention to our efforts.

Goal 3: Ensure that our internal systems, structures, and ways of working reflect our values and advance the sector's needs.

1. Identify the agency's high level competencies, structure, and culture needed for implementation and alignment with strategic goals.

Achievements to date:

- The Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of internal competencies and organizational structure to ensure alignment with strategic priorities. Agency culture has been reinforced through ongoing DEIA initiatives, staff engagement practices, and professional development. These efforts help ensure that the agency's day-to-day operations reflect its values and that staff are empowered to contribute fully to the implementation of strategic goals.
2. Foster a culture of continuous improvement by a) using and b) periodically reevaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of our practices, policies, tools, and systems.

Achievements to date:

- Policies, procedures, and systems are regularly evaluated for efficiency and effectiveness. Over the past two years, staff have piloted new workflows, incorporated audit recommendations and operational best practices, and updated procurement, travel, and HR processes. Feedback loops through staff memos and surveys have been institutionalized, ensuring continuous refinement of tools and practices.

3. Leverage tools and technology to streamline work.

Achievements to date:

- Mass Cultural Council has made significant technology investments to modernize operations. These include expanding use of SmartSimple for grants management, implementing MMARS and CIW enhancements to strengthen fiscal reporting, and upgrading the cybersecurity system and training to ensure compliance. Staff have also transitioned to upgraded laptops, cloud-based collaboration platforms, and virtual meeting tools, improving both workflow efficiency and accessibility across teams. In addition, staff participate in monthly technology training designed to build skills and maximize the effective use of targeted tools.

4. Operationalize a practice of communication and cross agency collaboration among staff and between departments as it relates to strategic goals.

Achievements to date:

- Agency-wide practices, such as daily memos, monthly all-staff meetings, and cross-departmental working groups, have strengthened internal communication and collaboration. Strategic goals are consistently connected to staff-level work, ensuring alignment. This connection is reinforced through updated job descriptions, regular planning cycles, project updates, and individual goal setting, which help staff see how their responsibilities contribute to the larger mission.

5. Build a culture and internal supports which prioritize and promote staff relationship building with and outreach to all constituents (sector, partners, government and civic leaders).

Achievements to date:

- Staff are encouraged and supported to build relationships with grantees, partners, and civic leaders. Initiatives like equity planning efforts and outreach have deepened community engagement. The launch of the Tribal Cultural Council program and the Access & Disability Learning Hub demonstrates a commitment to expanding and sustaining sector-wide relationships.

6. Develop clear roles and responsibilities for governing council members that align with strategic goals.

Achievements to date:

- Council member expectations have been articulated through strategic engagement in key initiatives. Council input is actively integrated into budgetary, policy, and programmatic decisions, ensuring governance supports the strategic plan.



Power of culture

PROGRAMS UPDATE

OCTOBER 2025

Programs Updates. The following are updates about Mass Cultural Council's programs, for your information and reference.

PROGRAM OPERATIONS

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

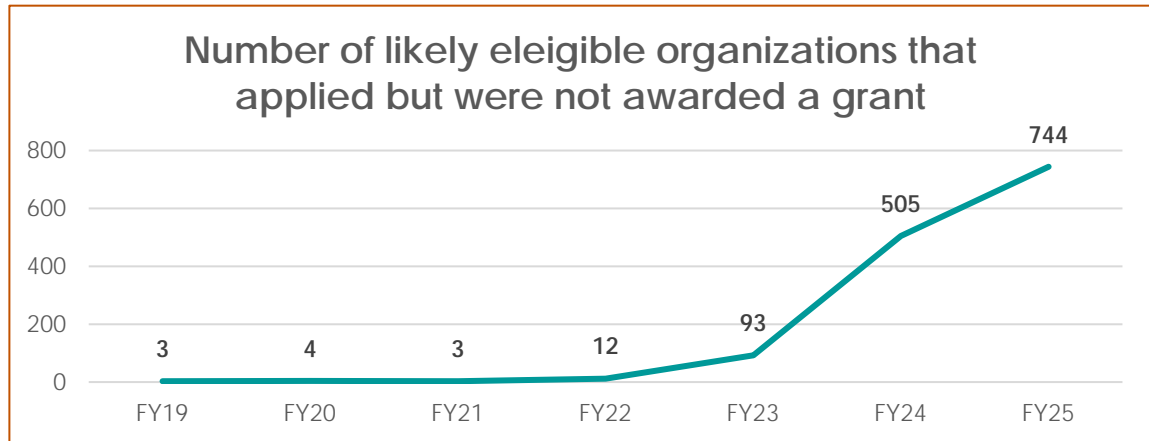
Grant Systems Management

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 4 years. We have seen a steady increase in applications from organizations in the cultural sector.

To date we have received 16,850 applications for our FY26 programs:

- 13,145 Local Cultural Council Program, the highest number of applications received!
- 4 Social Prescription
- 619 Operating Grants for Organizations
- 181 Cultural Investment Portfolio
- 1,557 Creative Experiences
- 86 YouthReach
- 1,164 Grants for Creative Individuals, application **still open**
- 7 Cultural Facilities Fund, application **still open**
- 30 Cultural District Investment Grant, application **still open**
- 56 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.



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 are working to thoughtfully coordinate and limit our grants. We have been moving in this direction over the past couple of fiscal years. In FY25 & FY26 we took steps to ensure our grants reach as many organizations as possible:

- Cultural Facilities Fund has a 2-year wait period for successful Capital Grant recipients.
- 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.
- Because FY26 is a transition year for YouthReach, those grantees can receive both YouthReach and a second grant, up to a cap of \$55,000. In FY27 they will only be able to receive one.

As we move into FY27 and finalize the design and redesign of our programs, we anticipate that ensuring our funds can reach as many organizations as possible will mean further coordination of and communication about our programs so that organizations will be able to determine which program is the best fit for them.

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

- **Universal Participation (UP):** Applications from UP Designated organizations for the 5k UP Innovation Fund are due by October 30. Over half the eligible organizations have completed the application/attestation. The UP

Innovation Fund as an access grant for organizations with the badge of UP Designation; the \$5,000.00 is to be invested in "access", as defined and directed by the organization's priorities.

Program Support

- Monthly meeting with Organizations Team, Communities Team, Cultural Facilities Fund Team, Artists & Youth, and Public Affairs. Provided individual counsel for the Creative Individuals' grant applicants.
- Accessible Trails S446/H915: legislation to expand access to trails for people of all abilities. Listening sessions.
- The [Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities](#) is launching a statewide series of community hearings. Needham Town Hall on Tuesday, November 4, from 5pm to 7pm. These gatherings are designed to connect with people with disabilities, families, caregivers, service providers, and advocates to listen, learn, and strengthen our work. The resource fair will bring together local organizations, state agencies, and disability commissions.

Meetings and Events

- UP Innovation Fund Office Hour September 26.
- Access 101 for Freedoms Way National Heritage Area webinar September 23.
- Access 101 for recipients of the Creative Experience grant September 30.
- SPOTLIGHT on the Hub October 8.
- Access Office Hours with Open Door Arts November 12 - Policy Practice & Procedures: Foundational Essentials & Quick Wins
- Building Community: Intentional Invitation, December 9

Advancement

- Envisioning Access: Assistive Technology Innovator, Plymouth Pine Hills Golf Club
- Mass Housing: symposium planning for Arts and Culture year.
- Tufts University Art Gallery: symposium planning for Art, Archives, and Access.
- Community Access Monitor: Training and certificate from Mass Office on Disability

ARTISTS & YOUTH

Artist & Youth Team: Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Amy Chu, Summer Confuorto, Käthe Swaback

Creative Experiences

In September 2025, the Agency announced \$3,375,000 in Creative Experiences grants to support 708 festivals, residencies, performances, and other cultural

activities across the Commonwealth. These one-year grants of \$2,500 or \$5,000 each, fund accessible and engaging programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences. Amy Chu from the Artists & Youth Team is supporting Creative Experiences grantees with contract and other questions. The program staff, which represents members of three different program teams at Mass Cultural Council (Artists & Youth, Communities, and Organizations), is also preparing to launch the FY27 Creative Experiences application in March.

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 in September (see recording), holds weekly office hours, and supports applicants via email and phone. Deadline is October 28, 2025, after which staff will verify application accuracy. Staff will then assemble reviewers from the Massachusetts creative/cultural community who will score each application. We will present grant recommendations (anticipating approx. 450 grants) to the February Program Committee and Council meetings.

YouthReach

FY26 is an important transition year for the YouthReach Program, which supports innovative creative youth development programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences. The current cohort of YouthReach grantees are in their final year of funding. Meanwhile, we are preparing guidelines and a new, streamlined application for FY27 YouthReach grants, which we anticipate opening in February 2027.

Poet Laureate

The team has been working with the Office of Governor Maura Healey to support their management of the Commonwealth's first-ever Poet Laureate, Regie Gibson. Those interested in the Poet Laureate can learn more on [Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov).

Meetings/Events

- Amy Chu wrote an article for the Power of Culture blog compiling insights from past funded school-based creative projects.
- Summer Confuorto is a leading member of the staff team overseeing the Agency's Native American and Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee. Also, in September, Summer Confuorto met with colleagues of other State Arts Agency for a project to strengthen resources for community cultural documentation, supported by a grant from the American Folklore Society.
- Käthe Swaback attended the Creating Healthy Communities: Arts in Public Health Convening in Newark, NJ in October.

Advancement

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

- o 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.
- o Supported the "Live Music at Logan" project, helping bring live local music into MassPort's Logan International Airport, program extended to end of calendar year.
- o Ongoing partnership with Governor's Office to exhibit Massachusetts artists in the Governor's waiting room at the State House.
- o Continued partnership with Work Without Limits, offering benefits counseling so our grantees can understand the impact of our grants on their public benefits.
- o 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.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Communities Team: Lisa Simmons, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Timothea Pham, Sommers Smith, Greg Torrales, Jay Wong

Cultural District Designation Redesign

In August the Council approved reserving funds for the current 58 Cultural Districts. These Districts are currently in the process of completing their applications for funding. In addition, staff presented the process for The Cultural District redesign and that we would not be accepting any new cultural districts in FY26.

Our work with Civic Moxie has been completed and we are now in the process of creating guidelines for the new program that will be available in November 2025 for both existing and new districts. On the Council page on our website, you will be able to see a presentation we made to the Programs Committee on October 22 for a high level summary of the new program.

In FY26, staff will be working with current districts to support them in complying with the new guidelines. Applications for new districts will open in FY27. The new guidelines for the Cultural District program will strengthen the partnership between the district and the municipality, requiring municipalities to financially invest 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 3 types of governance models that will need to be strengthened with a signed Local Partnership Agreement and include roles and responsibilities as well as a

business/sustainability plan over 3 years. The plan must have specific goals that are aligned with municipal and regional goals.

There will be a new review process for existing and future districts that will include and LOI, site visits, new application review process that will include key stakeholders from other state agencies.

In lieu of recertification/re-designation process, districts will be assessed annually to ensure compliance and/or identify the need for additional support.

In terms of funding, FY26 (or FY27) will be the final year of annual funding for current Cultural Districts. Starting in FY27/28:

- New districts will receive one-time Start-Up Grant to support the launch of the district. No Match required.
- Current and future districts will have the opportunity to apply for a one-time 3-year Accelerator Grant that leverages more municipal funding with increasing matching requirements.

Districts who cannot meet the requirements for a State designated district can continue as locally-designated cultural district, or 'Municipal Cultural District'. These districts do not require state review just a signed agreement or proof of municipal endorsement.

We want all communities to continue to be successful in infusing arts and culture into their community and economic development efforts, regardless of whether their municipality has the capacity to maintain a formal state designation currently.

Tribal and Local Cultural Council Programs

We are coming into the second grant cycle for the Tribal Cultural Councils. In FY26 we will have 4 Tribal Cultural Councils participating in the program. The current TCCs are Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Cultural Council (HPWTCC), Aquinnah Tribal Cultural Council, Nipmuc/k Tribal Cultural Council and Mâseepee Cultural Council all accepted applications until October 16th.

The 329 Local Cultural Councils have completed the grant cycle, and over 10K applications have been received. The LCCs are currently holding grant meetings and making decisions on local grants for their communities. Their annual reports that will include all of the approved applications are due January 16th, 2026.

CULTURAL FACILITATES FUND (CFF)

CFF Team: Jay Paget, Miranda Cook

After the May 2025 grant announcements, staff worked with several applicants who did well in the 2025 review process but whose implementation timeline was long enough to allow waiting six months. We reached out for project updates,

estimates or bids for the work, resumes, updates on fundraising progress, operating plans, and timelines.

In September, the CFF Advisory Committee voted to finalize 5 new capital grant recommendations and to approve the FY26 Guidelines. The grant recommendations total \$823,000.

The new CFF application went live on October 9 and will be **due December 11**. Staff will conduct an Information Session on October 20 that will be available on YouTube. We also will have office hours twice a week until the application deadline.

Meetings/Events

- We are hosting a webinar [“Decarbonizing Your Cultural Facility”](#) on **November 6**. This 90-minute webinar will address Green Building Performance Standards, strategies for electrification and learning about decarbonization audits, and action plans.

Advancement

- We released two case studies about “Adapting Public Buildings for Creative Uses” featuring [The 204 Cultural Arts Municipal Building and CitySpace, Easthampton](#).

ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations Team: Sara Glidden, Lindiana Flores, Kalya King, Lillian Lee

Operating Grants for Organizations

Grant announcements for the second cycle of Operating Grants for Organizations were made following the August Council meeting. We had received 368 eligible applications, out of a total of 465 received. Grants were awarded to 67 organizations, and all organizations were informed of the grant decisions in early September. Organizations staff were available for discussions with declined applicants, and from September – October, we met one-on-one or had phone conversations with over 50 organizations to give them detailed feedback on their applications. Some content from these conversations will be used to inform future program revisions. One declined applicant, The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, asked for a reconsideration of the grant rejection. We followed our published protocol, and notified them that we stand by the decision.

Organizations team members have been participating in in-person grant celebrations, and we will be hosting an orientation session webinar for new grantees on November 6th.

Gaming Mitigation Fund

Program Officer Lillian Lee has been developing an annual report which collects all of the information necessary to implement the second year of grant funding calculations, and also collects information about impact of the grant. There will be a information session for the program on November 5, 2025.

Card to Culture

Program Officer Lindiana Flores has been revising the program application and annual report to streamline the process. She has been meeting with various agencies such as Mass Housing to promote the use of the program. We are approaching 600 organizations registered to participate in the Card to Culture program.

Advancement

- *Program Manager Sara Glidden has been participating in meetings with the Department of Early Education and Care to explore partnerships that could benefit organizations, artists, and the early education providers.*



Power of culture

FY26 GRANT & PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

OCTOBER 2025

Social Prescription (Agenda Item 11a)

To: Mass Cultural Council
 Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Erik Holmgren, Käthe Swaback
 Dt: October 29, 2025
 Re: Social Prescription: FY26 NEA Arts and Health Grant Recommendations

Summary

In FY26, the National Endowment for the Arts offered State Arts Agencies the opportunity to apply for \$25,000 for new projects connecting the arts and health or an additional \$75,000 to support existing projects in Arts and Health. These funds were in addition to the standard state partnership grants the NEA makes each year. Mass Cultural Council applied for, and received, \$75,000 to expand our groundbreaking arts prescription program.

The agency decided to pursue an investment in “Federally Qualified Health Centers”, specifically those that were 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 and cost-effective solution for mental health and social isolation challenges, among others. By targeting community health centers with this grant, our goal is to build relationships, stories, and data with MassHealth clients and continue our dialogue with our partners across state government about the long-term inclusion of the practice in our public health care system.

Recommendations

We received a total of four applications that met the eligibility criteria and had existing or new relationships with our partner in this work, Art Pharmacy, which enabled them to deliver these services during the grant period. These applicants included:

- North End Community Health Committee, Incorporated (Boston)
- NeighborHealth Corporation (East Boston)
- Family Health Center of Worcester, Inc. (Worcester)

- Fenway Community Health Center, Inc. (Boston)

The applications were scored internally by staff, who are recommending the three highest-scoring organizations be funded with \$25,000 each for the implementation of arts prescriptions. Based on the application, we anticipate these three health centers will write more than 500 prescriptions by the end of the fiscal year. The recommended organizations include:

- NeighborHealth Corporation (East Boston), \$25,000
- Family Health Center of Worcester, Inc. (Worcester), \$25,000
- Fenway Community Health Center, Inc. (Boston), \$25,000

The only applicant we are not recommending at this time is the North End Community Health Committee, Incorporated, which did not appear prepared to deploy an arts prescription program at this time. However, we feel that they may be ready for future opportunities should they arise.

The Programs Committee recommended these grants for approval by Council.

Creative Advantage Grant to MassChallenge (Agenda Item 11b)

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Erik Holmgren, Carolyn Cole
Dt: October 29, 2025
Re: Creative Advantage Grant to MassChallenge

Overview

MassChallenge is an open innovation community with a mission to catalyze the success of visionary founders launching high-impact businesses. As a non-profit organization, they deliver a series of accelerator programs and cultivate a vibrant, inclusive community of experts, innovators, business leaders, and policy makers.

We are recommending a \$25,000 grant to MassChallenge to partner on **Creative Advantage** - a bold new collaboration designed to fuse the creative process of artists with entrepreneurs in the Commonwealth. The focus of the grant will be on publicizing the link between our two fields through press releases, op-eds, and social media, and to develop a proposal for a longer-term partnership that exemplifies the role of creativity in the innovation economy that continues to drive the Commonwealth's leadership across a number of industries.

This grant drives a key component of the advancement work at the Mass Cultural Council – positioning our field as an essential partner across sectors and, more specifically, in workforce and economic development in the innovation economy.

The Programs Committee recommended this grant for approval by Council.

Clarification: Ability to award unused approved grant funds (Agenda Item 11c)

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: Michael Bobbitt, David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Bethann Steiner
Dt: October 29, 2025
Re: Ability to award unused approved grant funds

Summary

After announcing the grants that the Council approved at the August meeting, staff on the Creative Experience team did a debrief/review of the cycle. In conducting the review, they identified two organizations that should have been recommended for funding in August but were inadvertently deemed ineligible due to a lack of clarity relative to their IRS 501(c)(3) status. In a typical year, a handful of Creative Experience grants are cancelled either because in the payment process, we discover they are not eligible, or because the organization cancels the funded program and declines the grant. We typically move those unencumbered funds over to another program. However, due to this error on our part, we would like to reassign any cancelled grant funds to the two Creative Experience applicants that should have been included in the August recommendations:

- West Springfield Music Parents Association, West Springfield, \$2,500
- The Brewster Band, Brewster, \$5,000

We already have FY26 Creative Experience grants that have been cancelled, which total \$10,000.

In August, each of the program memos included language to the effect of

“To the extent not such amounts approved can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grant programs”.

While we could say it is implied that we can reassign grant funds within a program as well as to another program, we wanted to flag this clarification for you in this memo. From this point forward, we will include the following language within each program memo:

“To the extent not all such amounts approved for this program can be used in FY26, staff requests the ability to re-allocate any such unused funds to other grantees who would have been next eligible for such funds or to other FY26 grant programs.”

The Programs Committee recommended this clarification for approval by Council.