

Posted online 2/6/26



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**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
PROGRAMS COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026
1:00 – 2:30 PM**

BROADCAST MEETING

MEETING WILL BE LIVESTREAMED AT

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Qm1CGZg0Sml>

MEETING MATERIALS WILL BE POSTED ONLINE AT

[HTTPS://MASSCULTURALCOUNCIL.ORG/ABOUT/BOARD/](https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/board/)

Under "February 11, 2026 - Programs Committee Meeting"

AGENDA	VOTE
1. Call to Order – Open Meeting Law Notice	
2. Minutes -October 22, 2025 Meeting	X
3. Co-Chairs Report	
4. Acting Executive Director Report	
5. Programs Update	
6. Conflicts of Interest	
7. FY26 Grant Recommendations	X
7a. Gaming Mitigation Fund	
7b. Grants for Creative Individuals	
8. Adjourn	

OPEN MEETING LAW STATEMENT

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

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

This meeting is a virtual meeting held under the Open Meeting Law as modified under current law to permit online meetings. This meeting is being broadcast to the public on a publicly available YouTube channel as described in the posted meeting notice.

Instructions on how to contact the Council with questions or problems accessing the broadcast are also included in such notice. Only Council members, staff and invited guests will be provided access to the Zoom platform hosting the meeting. As a safety measure, in order to prevent disruption of the meeting or non-public communications among the participants, the Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Committee of Mass Cultural Council has asked staff to implement the following protocols for participants in on-line meetings of Mass Cultural Council or its committees:

- Any "chat" or similar function on the Zoom platform hosting the meeting shall be disabled.
- Other than Council members or participants specifically recognized by the Chair of the meeting, all Zoom platform participants will be muted and have no ability to share media or documents or project or type images or text.
- All participants in the Zoom platform may be required to enter a waiting room and digitally sign-in before being admitted.

- Any attendee in the Zoom platform who nonetheless causes a disruption will be summarily removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

This meeting is not a public hearing and public testimony will not be taken. Individuals may not address the meeting without permission of the Chair.

Any member of the public may record this meeting provided that they do not interfere with the meeting.

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

**TIPS FOR PARTICIPATING IN A VIRTUAL OPEN MEETING USING ZOOM OR OTHER
VIDEOCONFERENCING PLATFORMS WHEN THERE ARE SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS**

(adapted from several sources)

- In order to minimize background noise, please mute microphone when not speaking.
- Please raise hand in order to be recognized by the chair.
- In order for all members to have an opportunity to speak and be heard, please wait to speak until specifically recognized by the chair.
- If there are questions, please direct them to the chair and the chair will then recognize the appropriate person to respond.
- Please limit statements to three minutes.
- The chair will reserve the right to limit discussion in order to allow sufficient time for every member to be heard who wishes to speak.
- Modify Video Settings to “Hide all non-video participants”- this will make it easier to follow who is speaking and participating
- In the event of a service interruption during a Zoom call due to hackers, so-called “zoom bombing” or other technical difficulties, staff will indicate the call is to be terminated. Please exit the call and staff will circulate instructions by email for a new Zoom call to continue the meeting.



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MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026

(In advance of the 167th meeting of Mass Cultural Council on February 25, 2026)

RESOLUTIONS

Section 2 - Minutes

RESOLVED: that the Programs Committee approves the Minutes of the October 22, 2025 Programs Committee Meeting in the form presented.

Section 7(a) - Gaming Mitigation Program

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the Gaming Mitigation Program grants as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

Section 7(b) - Grants for Creative Individuals

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the Grants for Creative Individuals, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.



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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

Online Meeting

Committee Members Present were

Cecil Barron-Jensen, Co-Chair of the Programs Committee
Julie Wake, Co-Chair of the Programs Committee
Marc Carroll, Council Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Council Vice Chair
Emily Bramhall
Donna Haghghat
Ashley Occhino
Mark Snyder

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff
Dan Blask, Program Manager
Erik Holmgren, Strategic Partnerships & Advancement Manager
Lisa Simmons, Program Manager
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager
Timothea Pham, Program Officer

Co-Chair Julie Wake called the meeting to order at 1:02pm and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement. Julie then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their last meeting held on August 6, 2025, and called for a motion to approve them. After

motion made and duly seconded, by roll call vote and noting that Simone Early and Cecil Barron Jensen were absent it was unanimously.

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

Co-Chair Cecil Barron Jensen joined shortly after the vote was taken. She thanked Julie for starting the meeting and asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael reflected on the fall Programs efforts and the strength and reach of the Agency in general. He noted that several major programs had opened for the season, including the Local Cultural Council (LCC) program, which experienced a rise in applicant volume and record participation. Michael emphasized the dedication of staff and the importance of advancement work, highlighting the redesign of the Cultural Investment Portfolio (CIP) which led to the launch of Operating Grants for Organizations (OGO). He noted that former CIP recipients had expressed disappointment at not being successful in OGO, and staff are working to ensure all applicants feel seen and supported. Michael also highlighted Public Affairs' celebratory campaign for new grantees through stickers, selfie frames, and welcome letters. He also shared that the Agency's advancement efforts have unlocked over \$2 million for the cultural sector, with additional resources on the horizon. Michael praised staff, particularly Erik Holmgren and Carolyn Cole, for leading work that positions creativity as a problem-solving tool across sectors. Michael shared that one of the most promising initiatives, Arts Prescriptions, has generated interest from various agencies, including public health providers and municipal health plans. Beyond this, the Agency is engaging with the Executive Office of Economic Development, MassHire, MassHousing, Department of Conservation and Recreation, MassPort, the Department of Public Health, and opioid relief funds which are establishing the cultural sector as an integral partner in addressing critical health and human services challenges. Michael also noted several upcoming events, including upcoming grant celebrations, the Council Meeting on October 29, and an arts in higher-education convening at Boston University on October 31. There were no questions for Michael.

Cecil and Julie then invited Program Manager Lisa Simmons and Program Officer Timothea Pham to present an update on revisions to the Cultural Districts Initiative (CDI). Lisa explained that the redesign focused on maintaining program intent while improving sustainability, professionalization, and municipal engagement. The process involved close examination of the enabling act, feedback from focus groups, and consultation with multiple agencies. She emphasized that districts were being redesigned to ensure stronger municipal buy-in, to better align with economic drivers and tourism, and to help districts become sustainable over time. New guidelines for districts are expected by mid-November. Timothea Pham, who has managed the Creative Experiences Program for seven years, introduced herself and with Lisa walked the Committee through the presentation deck which is available upon request.

Committee Members asked questions about the number of current districts (58) and how many are expected to succeed under the new metrics. Lisa noted that she expects about 75% of districts to meet the standards in the first 18 months but acknowledged challenges for districts lacking municipal support. Emily Bramhall thanked Lisa and Timothea for their presentation and raised concerns from the perspective of small towns, emphasizing that some municipalities may not have resources to provide funding or staff support, questioning whether districts would struggle to meet the new expectations, and asking if alternative funding sources, such as community foundations, could be considered. Lisa clarified that municipal contributions could be in-kind rather than cash and could include support such as permitting or security services, helping districts meet the requirements without overburdening municipal budgets.

Michael emphasized that the program is designed as an economic development and placemaking tool and that districts must demonstrate infrastructure and sustainability. He noted that state funding comes from designated funds, that districts are still eligible for other grants, and that staff will support districts in building capacity during the transition.

Julie and Jo-Ann discussed the potential challenges of smaller or resource-limited districts, noting concerns about equity and unintended consequences if wealthier communities have more capacity to comply. Michael responded that multiple paths exist for districts to comply, including leveraging other resources and philanthropic support and in-kind support, and that the Agency would provide guidance and support to help districts succeed. Ashley highlighted that municipalities could use supplemental taxes, business improvement districts, or other creative revenue streams to support districts, while Michael noted that districts could also generate earned revenue, such as ticketed events or partnerships with local businesses.

Council members discussed the three-year sustainability timeline for districts, emphasizing the need for districts to develop infrastructure and municipal partnerships while continuing to receive Agency support. Cecil shared experience with the Nantucket Cultural District, noting that transitioning nonprofit staff to municipal employment had been successful. Dave clarified that cultural areas can naturally form on their own in municipalities and that state recognition of an official "district" is an additional designation rather than a requirement. Michael emphasized that municipal buy-in is critical and that the program has built-in flexibility to account for varying local capacities. The Committee also discussed upcoming resources, webinars, and peer support networks to help districts share best practices and navigate the redesign.

Cecil then asked Dave to remind the members of the conflicts of interest policy. Dave asked if any members had a conflict of interest with any of the four proposed grantees named in the meeting materials. Marc disclosed he had a connection with Fenway Community Health Center and that he would abstain

from voting and/or discussing grants pertaining to Fenway Community Health Center.

Cecil then asked Erik Holmgren to give his presentation on advancement programs potentially receiving grants. For Arts on Prescription, Erik explained that the Agency received \$75,000 from the National endowment for the Arts to expand partnerships with community health centers, anticipating the ability to accommodate approximately 1,000 prescriptions. Michael noted that most funding goes directly to arts organizations and patient experiences, creating new revenue streams for the sector. Erik highlighted the patient journey, including connections with care navigators and support for transportation or companion tickets, and emphasized tracking of outcomes such as adherence, general wellness, and social engagement. Council members inquired about operational details and support for health centers, with Michael confirming that the program is designed to provide both financial and logistical support for implementing the pilot.

Erik also discussed a \$25,000 planning grant for MassChallenge, focused on connecting creativity and entrepreneurship in the innovation economy. The grant is intended to begin a longer-term partnership that includes public storytelling, joint fundraising, and engagement with the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Then Dave reviewed the vote for clarifying the process for reallocating unused approved funds if grantees become ineligible or otherwise don't accept an approved grant – funds may be reallocated to the next eligible grantee for that or another grant program. There were no questions, and Cecil requested a motion to recommend to the full Council the three grants outlined by staff. Upon motion duly made and seconded, and by roll call, noting Simone was absent and with abstentions noted, it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council the Social Prescription: NEA Arts & Health Grants in the amount of \$75,000 as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council a Creative Advantage grant to Mass Challenge of \$25,000, as presented at the Programs Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: To recommend to Mass Cultural Council 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 presented to the Programs Committee.

Cecil and Julie confirmed there were no further questions and adjourned the meeting at 2:31 PM.

UPDATED Conflicts of Interest Notifications - Mass Cultural Council Members

As of February 11, 2026

1. Marc Carroll
 - a. Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
 - b. The Rivers School
2. Jo-Ann Davis
 - a. The Care Center
 - b. Springfield Museums
 - c. MASS Creative
3. Allyce Najimy
4. Cecil Barron Jensen
 - a. Artists Association of Nantucket
 - b. Egan Maritime Institute
 - c. Nantucket Cultural District
5. Simone Early
6. Mark Snyder
7. Che Anderson
 - a. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
 - b. Worcester Historical Museum
 - c. Worcester Art Museum
 - d. Institute of Contemporary Art
8. Donna Haightat
 - a. WAM Theater
9. Iván Espinoza-Madrigal
 - a. New England Foundation for the Arts
 - b. Institute for Contemporary Art
10. Julie Wake
 - a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod
 - b. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute
11. Rhonda Anderson
 - a. New England Foundation for the Arts
 - b. Mass Humanities

c. Ohketeau Cultural Center

12. Emily Bramhall

13. David Kong

14. Anika Lopes

a. Ancestral Bridges Foundation

15. Petrina Martin

16. Ellice Patterson

a. Abilities Dance

17. 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

18. Diane Asadorian Masters

19. Thomas Bernard

a. Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

Procedure for dealing with conflicts of interest on Mass Cultural Council grant votes.

Prior to any Council or Programs Committee meeting where individual grants will be voted on, staff will compile a list of conflicts of interest by identifying any potential recipient of council funds to be voted on at that meeting to which any Council member has an identified connection. Unless a Council member indicates otherwise, it is assumed that the Council member will abstain from all discussion and any vote regarding such grantee.

A document listing these possible conflicts of interest (the "conflicts list") will be distributed to the board at the beginning of the meeting.

After presentation of grant recommendations for a particular program, before a motion for vote, the chair should refer to the list and 1) ask the members present if the conflicts list is accurate and if the members identified will abstain from votes and discussion for the relevant organizations as identified on the conflicts list and 2) ask if any other conflicts exist which should be added to the conflicts list.

After dealing with any necessary corrections or additions, the chair will then ask for a motion approving the grant/allocation recommendations noting that the Council members noted on the conflict list will abstain from discussion and votes for certain organizations in accordance with the conflicts list. It will not be necessary for any member with a conflict to leave the room as long as such member does not participate in any decision regarding the affected organization and it is specifically noted in the minutes that such member abstained from all discussion and votes regarding the specified organization.

Sample script for a meeting vote:

CHAIR: We will now consider votes approving the grant recommendations. Please note the conflicts list that has been distributed. Staff members have compiled these lists to identify members that have a real or potential conflict of interest in connection with this vote. Please indicate 1) if there are any inaccuracies on the list or 2) if any additional conflicts need to be disclosed.

[If any corrections or additions are noted by board members, the conflicts list will be amended at this time]

Noting the abstentions disclosed on the *[corrected]* conflicts list, the chair now calls for a motion to approve the grants recommendations for this program.

Then, upon motion duly and made and seconded, with the abstentions noted above, it was VOTED: ...]"

In the minutes recording this vote, the following will be included

[Council Member X] disclosed that s/he would abstain from any discussion or vote regarding the provision of a grant or other assistance to {list affiliated organizations }



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ADDITIONAL FY26 GRANT & PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

FEBRUARY 2026

Gaming Mitigation Fund (Agenda Item 7a)

To: Mass Cultural Council
Fr: David Slatery, Lillian Lee, Sara Glidden, Jen Lawless
Dt: February 11, 2026
Re: FY26 Gaming Mitigation Program

Overview

For the FY26 Gaming Mitigation Fund Cycle, we are in Year 2 of a 2-year grant, which means there were no open applications accepted. Of the 57 organizations from Year 1 (FY25), 51 will be receiving a grant in Year 2. Five of the organizations not receiving a Year 2 award chose instead to move forward with Operating Support funding, and one organization permanently closed. There is \$3,568,500 available for funding this cycle, which is \$5,700 less than the FY25 cycle (\$3,574,200).

Final Report and Formula Funding Factors

As this is the first time the Gaming Mitigation Fund has been a multi-year award, we needed to develop a Final Report. In previous cycles, the next application functioned as a Final Report (so an organization that received FY24 funding was not required to submit a separate report, just to apply in FY25). The Final Report was developed to verify continued eligibility and capture the necessary information for the formula funding factors (Percent of performances featuring an eligible touring entity and Total fees paid to eligible touring entities).

There was significant overlap between the application and the Final Report, with some questions being simplified or streamlined in the report. The most notable instance of this is the Spreadsheet of Performances, which is required in the application to verify the final numbers used for the formula funding factor. We did not require this spreadsheet for the report, but instead asked for the final numbers only.

We did have a narrative space where organizations were required to explain significant changes in these numbers (an increase or decrease of greater than

20%). This narrative space functioned as intended, and organizations with significant increases or decreases were able to explain why the changes occurred. Staff reviewed this field and used outside resources (such as performance listings, organization's websites, etc.) to help verify as needed. If additional information was required, organizations were given an option to revise the report during a two-week revision period after the report deadline passed. All organizations met the report and/or revision deadline.

Funding Breakdown

We have kept the formula components the same as last year (with the exception of the total amount of funding available):

- Grant range: \$6,000 - \$200,000
- Equity Impact Points: 40% increase for BIPOC-Centered organizations
- 20% cap on all decreases

The decision to maintain the 20% cap on decreases stems from wanting to maintain consistency across multi-year funding. The cap was implemented last year as it was a transition year for Gaming Mitigation with us changing the reporting model from calendar year to fiscal year, making it a 2-year instead of 1-year grant program, and disallowing organizations to receive both Gaming Mitigation and Operating Support. As we have kept it for this year, it means that no organization received a decrease in their grant amount of greater than 20%. Overall, this year only 17 organizations saw any decrease in their grant amount.

A recommended funding list is provided in **Appendix A**.

Grants for Creative Individuals (Agenda Item 7b)

To: Mass Cultural Council
 Fr: David Slatery, Jenifer Lawless, Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Summer Confuorto
 Dt: February 11, 2026
 Re: FY26 Grants for Creative Individuals

Summary

The Artists & Youth Team is pleased to submit for approval our Agency's recommendations for 464 awards in the FY26 Grants for Creative Individuals program. The grants are unrestricted awards of \$5,000 to applicants who demonstrate achievement of creative expression and commitment to their artistic/cultural practice.

The program launched in FY24 after a redesign as part of the Agency's Racial Equity Plan.

Program Overview

Eligibility

- Applications were open to Massachusetts artists/culture bearers/creative practitioners in ALL artistic/creative disciplines.
- Ineligible:
 - Undergrad students or grad students in the arts
 - Recent (past three years) recipients of direct Mass Cultural Council grants
 - Non-MA residents

FY26 Stats

- 3125 eligible applications
- 464 recommended grants (approx. 15% of applications, slightly up from FY25)
- Please note: if unspent funds from other programs become available between now and the February 25 Council meeting, staff will recommend additional grants (following the review process as laid out below) to share with the Council.

Funding Priorities

- Funding Priority (or modest ratings advantage) for "Underfunded" applicants, including those who identify as:

- BIPOC
- Having a Disability
- Recipients of anti-poverty benefits
- Veterans of the United States Armed Forces
- New grant recipients (no direct grant past 6 yrs)
- Traditional Artists/Culture Bearers

Review Process

- Geographic Distribution (same % of grants as % applications in each County, see “Grants by County” chart below)
- Funding Priorities (as listed above)
- Scores by reviewers from the Massachusetts creative/cultural sector based on how the applicants demonstrate **achievement of creative expression** and **commitment to their artistic/cultural practice**.

Timeline

- Application opened September 16, 2025
- Application deadline October 28, 2025
- Review process November 2025-January 2026
- Recommended grant awards to Programs Committee, February 11, 2026
- Full Council vote and visual presentation about the awards at Council Meeting, February 25, 2026
- Grants announced by March 2026
- Grantees who receive public benefits (for example, SNAP, MassHealth, or Supplementary Security Income) receive benefits counseling through our partnership with Work Without Limits, a program of UMass Chan Medical School
- Grant celebrations throughout the Commonwealth, March-May, Council Members encouraged to attend, details to come.

Grant Statistics

In keeping with the Agency's Racial Equity Plan and D/deaf and Disability Equity Plan, we present relevant data points in reaching equity goals:

Funding Priority Totals/Percentages for All Eligible Applications (3125)

No recent grant	BIPOC	Disability	Veteran	Poverty	Trad/Cultural Bearers
2947	1115	669	40	587	91
94.18%	35.63%	21.38%	1.28%	18.76%	2.91%

Funding Totals/Percentages for Recommended Grantees (464)

No recent grant	BIPOC	Disability	Veteran	Poverty	Trad/Cultural Bearers
459	264	141	14	116	49
98.92%	56.90%	30.39%	3.02%	25.00%	10.56%

New Applicants/New Grantees

- 1,764 applicants (55%) applied to the agency for the first time.
- 441 grantees (96%) are getting their first Mass Cultural Council grant.

Grants By County

County	Number of Applications	Number of Grants	Percentage
Barnstable	114	17	4%
Berkshire	128	19	4%
Bristol	166	25	Nu%
Dukes	14	3	0%
Essex	239	36	8%
Franklin	113	17	4%
Hampden	158	23	5%
Hampshire	255	38	8%
Middlesex	770	112	25%
Nantucket	6	1	0%
Norfolk	225	33	7%
Plymouth	122	18	4%
Suffolk	603	90	19%
Worcester	212	32	7%
Total	3125	464	100%

Following this memo, please find the following documents:

- **Appendix B:** Recommended FY26 Grants for Creative Individuals
- **Appendix C:** FY26 Reviewers for the Grants for Creative Individuals program.