

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

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL  
GRANTS COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 2022**

**ONLINE MEETING**

**Committee Members Present** were

Jo-Ann Davis, Chair of the Grants Committee  
Nina Fialkow, Council Chair  
Barbara Schaffer Bacon  
Karen Hurvitz  
Kathleen Castro

**Staff Members Present** were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director  
David Slatery, Deputy Director  
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, People & Culture Director  
Jen Lawless, Operations Director  
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director  
Dan Blask, Artist Fellowships Program Manager  
Carolyn Cole, Communities Initiative Program Officer  
Diane Daily, Education Program Manager  
Guelmi Espinal, Communities Initiative Program Officer  
Sara Glidden, Cultural Investment Portfolio Program Manager  
Erik Holmgren, Creative Youth Development Program Manager  
Maggie Holtzberg, Folk Arts & Heritage Program Manager  
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Public Relations & Events Manager  
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager  
Lisa Simmons, Communities Initiative Program Manager

Chair Jo-Ann Davis called the meeting to order at 10:01am and asked Deputy Director David Slatery to read the 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.

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- All participants in the Zoom platform must 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. The Chair will then inform the members of the meeting that they are being recorded.

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.

Jo-Ann then asked Committee Members to approve the minutes of their last business meeting held on May 3, 2022. Kathy Castro moved to approve the minutes and Barbara Schaffer Bacon seconded the motion. There were no questions or discussion. By roll call vote and noting that Marc Carroll, Che Anderson, Karen Barry, Cecil Barron Jensen, and Lillian Do were absent all were in favor, and it was

RESOLVED: that the Grants Committee approves the minutes of the May 3, 2022 Grants Committee Meeting in the form presented to the Grants Committee at its June 14, 2022 Meeting.

Jo-Ann noted that this is always one of her favorite meetings of the year and let Committee Members know its purpose is for staff to give a presentation on FY22 grantmaking data and a preview of FY23 plans. Jo-Ann thanked Operations Director Jen Lawless, Executive Director Michael Bobbitt and the entire staff team for preparing a comprehensive, thoughtful, detailed presentation and then turned the meeting over to Michael.

Michael thanked Jen for preparing today's presentation and for leading the Agency's transition to its new Grants Management System (GMS) and turned the meeting over to her.

Jen began by reiterating that the FY22 data the Committee would see today was pulled from the new GMS. She gave special thanks to Information Systems Coordinator Scott Hufford who has been with Mass Cultural Council for 30 years, worked on every database the Agency has ever had, and learned a brand-new system to compile the data the Committee would review today. She also thanked Grant Operations Officer Evelyn Nellum and the entire Grants team for their work supporting applicants and staff as they learned to navigate the new system.

She explained that the first half of her presentation would be a review of the FY22 data and the second half would be a preview of FY23 plans with the caveat that the preview would not include everything staff will do in FY23; it will summarize areas where staff is planning to propose changes and is seeking feedback and questions from the Committee on them. Jen explained that the Committee had received the raw data already and that her presentation today would include more analysis.

She then shared a PowerPoint presentation; a copy of the full presentation is available upon request. The presentation began with an analysis of how Mass Cultural Council's grantmaking compares with other state arts agencies. The data referenced is from the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA). Mass Cultural Council is seventh in the nation in terms of grants awarded but has the broadest reach in terms of grants made and communities and grantees funded.

Jo-Ann remarked that she thought this was interesting, especially comparing Massachusetts and New York. Jen added that Mass Cultural Council is one of very few SAAs that puts its full funding list on its website. Michael stated that the data is a bit difficult to fully comprehend and pointed out two things: first the number of grants relative to grant amount; second, the fact that if the data about communities is accurate, Mass Cultural Council is reaching only about half of Massachusetts zip codes and this information is helpful as the Agency works on its recruitment efforts.

Jen moved ahead in the presentation to look at the Agency's reach over time – the number of grants and the number of grantees. She noted that it appears there is a significant drop in FY22, but this is due to the fact that the Agency ran large Covid relief programs in the years preceding FY22, this number will increase again in FY23.

Next was a look at FY22 grantmaking by county and by program, Jen clarified that FY22

was a year where some programs did not take in new applicants, but rather carried forward existing grantees.

Jo-Ann asked if the Agency was serving all counties or just some of them and Jen responded that the Agency is serving all Massachusetts counties. Michael added that the Agency is serving somewhere between 45% and 55% of each county's applicants and that it's wonderful that half of all applicants from each county do receive funding; the success rate is very good. Michael noted that the one area where there is a struggle is Mass Cultural Council's Artist Fellowships. The Agency is not reaching a large percentage of applicants in that area.

Nina asked if this meant that there were many unqualified applicants to the Artist Fellowships program. Jen explained that the fellowship panels don't look at qualifications, they just look at the work submitted and then funding is based on a ranked list. Michael added that in FY22 the Agency doubled the number of Artist grants it gave out, but large growth is still needed. Jo-Ann wondered if this might be because they didn't meet eligibility criteria and Jen clarified that all 1,800 applicants were eligible, the issue was the amount of funding available versus the number of applicants. David added that the Artist Fellowship program was designed to be a contest that only 4% to 5% of applicants could win and that's how it has operated for 40 years. It wasn't meant to award funds to a large number of people. Nina recalled that there was a possibility that the program would no longer be a contest and Michael explained that this is something staff will be looking at over the next year, but that the Agency funds numerous artists through Local Cultural Councils. Jen added that teaching artists receive funding through the STARS program as well.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon stated that she supports moving resources in order to increase the number of artists receiving funding but that she wishes to be careful with the language the Agency uses as it discusses the possibility of not limiting its support of artists to fellowships.

Jen moved on to the next portion of the presentation: Application Analysis. First was geographic analysis of applications followed by a look at the change in applications from FY21 to FY22 by program. Jen noted that it appeared there was a decline in applications, but that the Big Yellow School Bus program (for example) hadn't been run in a couple of years due to the pandemic so that contributed to the appearance of a decline.

Next was a look at the demand by county compared to population. Jen noted that the difference between the percent total applications and the percent total population is no greater than 6% for all counties.

Barbara asked if staff was overlaying things like Gateway Cities that have economic factors built in when they looked at this data and if Jen was talking about individuals and organizations. Jen confirmed that she was talking about both individuals and organizations. Barbara noted that she sees that the Agency's YouthReach program does not have as great of a reach in some parts of the state and that is concerning to her. Michael let Barbara know that this is something staff will work on as the Agency develops its recruitment plans.

Jen moved ahead with a look at New Applicants (new since 2004) and what

percentage of them were successful. She highlighted that the success rate for new applicants to the Festivals program was particularly positive. Michael stated that he was not happy that renewals decreased each year, he'd love all grantees to return. However, if the legislature doesn't increase the Agency's line item each year as recruitment efforts are established, some tough decisions will need to be made. Michael wants to figure out how to fund all eligible applicants.

Jen moved ahead to a Grant Analysis. She noted that when looking at grant applications compared to approvals by county staff did not see any significant difference in success rates between counties. She then looked at what percentage of grantees within each program were new grantees.

This slide raised a couple of questions for Barbara. First about the relationship of staff work with applicants in the pre-application and application phases and how much does that assistance contribute to their success. Barbara's second observation was around the STARS program – it is set up so that people who know about the program are aware of the date the application opens and how the system works. She looks forward to reviewing that. Jen clarified that right now (regarding STARS) the focus is on relationships with schools, but that the focus may shift to look more at funding individuals and organizations. She added that staff does an excellent job of supporting applicants and that there is a desire to make applications as simple as possible. Jo-Ann stated that she had the same comment as Barbara and that when she Chaired the pandemic relief public forum in January, she heard many times that applications needed to be simplified.

The next slide indicated that 90% of FY22 grantees were organizations, 10% were individuals. Of the organizations that received a grant in FY22, 52% were nonprofit organizations, 43% were municipal government, 4% were unincorporated with a nonprofit purpose, and 1% were state government. In terms of discipline, 38% of funded organizations were multidisciplinary, 32% were discipline specific, and 30% were non-arts/humanities/science.

Jo-Ann asked if this breakdown was traditional and what one might expect to see from an agency like Mass Cultural Council. Michael was unsure and said he could check with NASAA. Jen stated that most SAAs only fund arts, but that Mass Cultural Council intentionally funds the sciences and humanities. Also, because of the Local Cultural Council program, there is a larger portion of municipal grantees.

Next was a look at the race and ethnicity of individual applicants and grantees. Applicants were 44% white, 14% BIPOC, 2% none of the above/self-identified, and 40% with no response. Grantees were 36% white, 23% BIPOC, 3% none of the above/self-identified, and 38% with no response. Jen noted that the segment with no data would likely get smaller with the new GMS. Most respondents didn't choose not to answer, they just didn't have the question back when they filled out the profile. Staff is working to make the question more prominent.

Jo-Ann asked if there were an "aha!" moments when staff looked at the data and what might the opportunities be in FY23. Michael stated that staff wants to make improvements in the racial diversity of its grantees; he noted that most applications in FY22 opened before the Agency's new Racial Equity Plan launched and that the Agency will begin to see the fruits of that plan in FY23. Michael thinks the desire to

improve funding for individual artists was an “aha” for him along with looking at counties and regions that have fewer applicants. Michael highlighted that in the beginning of the presentation in looking at the number of grants the Agency gives out compared with the amount of money it has, he encourages staff to pursue more general operating support, to scale back the number of programs as more programs means less time for recruitment. Michael wants to eradicate evaluative site visits and use that time for relationship building. The Agency's recruitment work will yield many changes. Jen added that the demographic information presented today looks at individuals only; staff is planning to look at demographics of organizations as well.

Barbara, referring to multidisciplinary grantees and, specifically, individual artists noted that many artists work collaboratively and all that needs to be taken into account. Many state arts agencies are organized by discipline, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) still is, so there needs to be another progression. Barbara also went back to her previous point about how citizens and residents are being served noting that perhaps there will never be a rural community doing a certain type of work and putting in an application, but the Agency may be able to do things to make sure services are being delivered by other organizations. She noted that the Agency has never looked at things from that angle, but that she can see value there; this might spur the creation of other organizations or hubs. Jen agreed with Barbara and stated that this is something staff has been wrestling with. A few years ago, the NEA began to include data where organizations can indicate where they are located and where they offer programming; this is something the Cultural Investment Portfolio team is looking at. Michael added that the Agency is bringing in a consultant to help staff define the terms “excellence” and “public value” and he'd like to add “community” to that list.

There were no further questions or comments from Committee Members, so Jen and Michael moved ahead to give a high-level outline of the Agency's focus for FY23. A copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Michael explained that the overall focus for FY23 included pandemic recovery programs, continuing progress on the Racial Equity Plan, and the development of a new Strategic Plan. To that Michael wished to add: operationalizing human resources and exploring more uses for the grants management system, all in the name of making things more efficient and easier for applicants and grantees.

Jen then gave brief program snapshots for FY23.

**Artist Fellowships** will temporarily pause for FY23. The team will administer the Pandemic Recovery Program for Individuals and redesign and expand Artist Fellowships as part of the Agency's racial equity review with the intent to relaunch the program in FY24.

The **Cultural Investment Portfolio** (CIP) team will administer the Pandemic Recovery Program for Organizations. Equity Impact Points will be in effect for FY23 CIP Portfolio grant amounts. Staff will continue working on a redesign of Portfolio guidelines. Funding for current Gateway grantees will be maintained.

**Festivals** and **Projects** will become one program in FY23 with racial equity considerations incorporated into the design of the new program. A \$2,500 grant amount is proposed.

Nina noted that not long ago the grant amount for **Festivals** was only \$500 and asked if

there were any new guidelines for festivals who might apply. Jen stated that the program is being redesigned. Last year when the grant amount grew to \$1,500 staff saw a huge increase in demand. The idea is to keep all the good elements of Festivals and all the good elements of Projects and create a broad, accessible program with a simple application.

Jo-Ann asked for a reminder on what **Projects** funds. Jen explained Projects grants fund any discreet set of activities, not festivals, and asked Program Manager Sara Glidden for an example. Sara stated that grantees could be (but are not limited to) exhibitions, theatrical productions, concert series, lecture series, historical tours, or summer programs for youth. Staff receives applications from cultural organizations that are not funded by the Portfolio and from organizations that are not cultural, but who are producing cultural programming.

The **Cultural Districts Initiative** will further streamline grantmaking and reporting by districts. The team will also review and revise designation and re-designation guidelines in FY23, most likely extending the designation period.

In FY23, **STARS Residencies** will allow cultural partners to apply directly, but the Agency will still hold a limit of one residency per school. The number of programs funded will be scaled. Staff will prioritize BIPOC and under-resourced communities as well as new applicants, and the new minimum grant size will be \$2,500.

Nina asked for clarification on the term "cultural partner." Jen explained that this could be an individual teaching artist submitting an application or an organization that sends teaching artists into schools.

**YouthReach** will seek to increase the number of FY23-FY25 grantees and plans a more specific proposal for August. Staff will also review and redesign YouthReach as part of the Agency's racial equity work to create more frequent on-ramps for new applicants and to simplify the process for all.

Barbara commented that, along with the Agency's racial equity goals, there needs to be some thought given to communities as YouthReach is adjusted. Transportation in rural communities is a challenge.

**Social Prescription** will support the current cohort for one more year, design a field guide, and identify a partner in FY23 who will take the program over in FY24.

**Universal Participation (UP)** will consolidate all programs to focus on the Innovation & Learning Network and a redesigned Innovation Fund Grant. The Innovation Fund Grant will become an annual grant to UP Designated organizations restricted to equity and access projects, trainings, professional development, programs, etc.

Barbara noted that the presentation did not include the Cultural Facilities Fund. Michael explained that staff made a few changes last year and are seeing the results of those changes now. Barbara asked if staff looked at budget size of organizations as compared to the percentage of our dollars. She doesn't attach judgement to this, but feels it is part of the Agency's accountability to have that information and understand how we are getting resources to others. Jen explained that FY22 final reports do ask about budget size and that staff can look at what the Agency's grantmaking looks like



based on the size of organizations. The challenge is that staff has only a piece of that picture at this point.

Nina thanked Jen, Michael, and the staff for their fantastic work acknowledging the time it took to prepare and noting that for Mass Cultural Council's authorizers it is very helpful to see how the Agency's money is spent.

Jo-Ann asked if this information would be presented to the full Council in August and Jen responded that this presentation was solely for the Grants Committee. In August a full spending plan would be presented. Jo-Ann suggested that in the spirit of transparency perhaps the presentation could be shared with the full Council and Michael agreed it could absolutely be shared.

Barbara asked in the context of the coming strategic planning process coming up if there could be some deeper inquiry into the Agency's relationship with schools. Barbara sometimes looks at the STARS program and thinks it could potentially be run by an outside partner. She is curious about the Agency's reasons for staying so deeply involved in schools. Another area Barbara hopes will be explored during the strategic planning process is the LCC program which she calls the Agency's "decentralization program." Barbara would like to explore the program in terms of how it came about and consider it as a model of decentralized decision making. It would be interesting to look at the program and compare it to other states.

Michael let Barbara know that he has created a document of strategic planning ideas and both of her suggestions are on his list. He is looking forward to having deep conversations about opportunities and where the Agency's focus will expand to in the future.

Program Manager Diane Daily responded to Barbara's question about STARS and the Agency's involvement in schools stating that the goal is to reach as many young people as possible with programming focused on the arts, sciences, and humanities and the best place to find young people is at school. By staying involved in schools the Agency can reach thousands of young people and support teaching artists and scientists. The reason for this is that the arts and creative sciences play a major role in child development. Barbara stated that she looks forward to discussing this further.

Michael stated that the Agency does need to make space. For an organization to be great at some things, it needs to be bad at other things and if you're bad at those things, don't do them. The conversation will continue.

Jo-Ann asked if there were any further comments from Committee Members or staff and there were none. She applauded the staff for their work and that concluded the Committee's business for the day. As Chair, Jo-Ann adjourned the meeting at 11:09am.