

Messaging Platform for Communities

Introduction

This *Power of Culture* messaging platform frames the value of what we do in a way that's clear, consistent, and evocative for all our audiences. This is not a script to be repeated verbatim; it is a resource to inform every communication we produce.

The messaging platform consists of four sections:

- 1. What we call ourselves:** Regardless of our specific roles, we are working to enrich the cultural life of our community. To foster a sense of unity and common purpose among all of us in the cultural field, we've developed a new name for this role – one that we hope will be embraced by everyone.
- 2. The power of culture:** Whether we work in the arts, humanities, or sciences, what we do is fundamentally about *culture*. That's why we put culture at the center of our messaging platform. For our purposes, we've broken down the definition into two related but distinct parts: *what culture is* and *what culture does*. Together, these form a powerful argument as to why culture – and our work – should matter to everyone in our community.
- 3. Putting it into words:** This section shows how we put our ideas about culture into action. We've divided this section into three parts: the first is a set of general concepts that should shape the way we tell our story in broad terms. The second section is an elevator speech: a three-level shorthand that makes it easy to explain *what we do*, *how we do it*, and *why it matters*. The third part shows how we customize language to address the concerns and priorities of our principal audiences.
- 4. Key terms:** Here you will find definitions for key words and concepts introduced in the messaging platform.

Section 1: What we call ourselves

There are many terms to describe people who work in the cultural field: staffers, volunteers, docents, members. Though technically accurate, these terms don't reflect the value we bring to our communities, or foster a sense of common purpose and unity with others working in the field. A more precise term might be: **cultural agent**.

To be a cultural agent is to serve culture beyond our specific roles in our organizations: We promote the value of culture in our community; we serve as advocates in government and businesses; we forge alliances and find common cause. Cultural agents are champions for the power of culture and as such, we have a profound impact in the lives of people across the Commonwealth.

Section 2: The power of culture

"Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living."
–T. S. Eliot (English poet, essayist, social critic, 1888-1965)

"As a source of exchange, innovation, and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature." –United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2002.

Culture matters. Whether we're trying to find meaning in the world, enrich our community, or promote social change, culture provides the context – the shared language – that brings people together to achieve great things. Culture is not a luxury: it's what makes our civilization possible. It's at the core of what it means to be human: in T.S. Eliot's words, culture is "that which makes life worth living."

As cultural agents, we believe in the power of culture. Our goal is to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents by promoting access, education, diversity, and excellence in culture. To fully understand this goal, we need a clear definition of what we mean by "culture": what it is, what it does, and what our role is within it.

What culture is

"Culture is a matrix of infinite possibilities and choices." –*Wole Soyinka (Nigerian Nobel Laureate)*

"A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people." –*Mahatma Gandhi (political leader for India's independence, 1869–1948)*

The word “culture” can mean many things to different people. Nevertheless, as cultural agents, we see culture first and foremost as a shared understanding of our universe and our place within it. More than just a heritage or a body of knowledge, culture provides context for our everyday life – it helps us create meaning and define what's possible. It's also the glue that holds our communities together. In fact, we are all linked together by a latticework of cultures: personal, familial, ethnic, professional, national. In its narrowest sense, culture can be used to intensify differences and create barriers between people. In its broader form, however, culture elevates us, connects us through our differences, expands our perspectives, and, in the words of Albert Einstein, “leads [us] towards freedom.”

As cultural agents, we're focused on culture in this broader sense as defined and expressed by the *arts, humanities, and sciences*. We understand culture, to paraphrase the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, as an ever-expanding resource that “belongs to all the people of the [Commonwealth].”

What culture does

Working through the *arts, humanities, and sciences*, culture becomes a powerful force for strengthening community, fostering creativity, and bringing about societal change. As our state grows more diverse, culture helps us build relationships across ethnic, racial, and generational lines. An indispensable part of a well-rounded education, culture creates people who are open and creative, ready to succeed in a globalized, increasingly competitive world. Culture is a proven economic driver, as well as an effective tool for sustainable development. Culture also makes our community a more *livable* place, which studies show can help us attract and retain a young, talented, and entrepreneurial workforce (see [Culture for Competitiveness: How Vibrant Culture Attracts Top Talent](#)).

As cultural agents, we believe that culture is an essential resource for the health and economic well-being of our community. To invest in our cultural life is to invest in our shared future.

Section 3: Putting it into words

What follows is a framework for incorporating the *Power of Culture* platform into the way we use language as a cultural organization. As explained in the introduction, this is not meant as a script to follow; rather, it should be read as a resource for language that will help us speak consistently and effectively about what we do and why it matters.

General concepts

1. *Make it about culture.* The *Power of Culture* platform puts culture front and center. It speaks broadly to the scope of our efforts, distinguishes what we do from other municipal agencies and nonprofit organizations, and explains why we matter. We should bring the word *culture* into any conversation about what we do – boldly, with confidence, and without apologies.
2. *Put the focus on outcomes.* At its most basic level, we aim to keep our language positive and aspirational. That's why, when we talk about what we do, we recommend that we put the focus on outcomes: what's the future state we're trying to achieve? Tactics and processes are important, but they become truly meaningful only when they are articulated in the context of a strategic vision.
3. *Talk up to your audience.* We need to address a wide range of audiences, from authorizers in government to individual artists to the general public. We want to make sure we choose language that is relevant and understandable, regardless of whom we're talking to. At the same time, we should never underestimate our audience: it's okay to push boundaries if we are always clear about the purpose and substance of what we're saying.

Elevator speech

1. What we do: *As [cultural agents, cultural organizations, etc.], we work to elevate the rich cultural life in our community. [General description of what we do in our communities.] Through our efforts, we make our community a better place to live, work, and visit for everyone.*
2. How we do it: *[Our specific roles and responsibilities. What follows is an example that is relevant to a Local Cultural Council.] As a Local Cultural Council, we work with the Mass Cultural Council and our municipal government to support the arts, humanities, and sciences through grants, initiatives, and advocacy for nonprofit cultural organizations, schools, and artists. More than a funder, we serve as leaders, stewards, advocates, catalysts, and conveners. We set priorities, nurture relationships, empower artists and practitioners of all stripes, and identify and celebrate excellence. As a public investor in the arts, humanities, and sciences, we ensure that everyone in our community has a place in our rich cultural life.*
3. Why it matters: *As [cultural agents, cultural organizations, etc.], we believe in the power of culture. Culture builds community, fosters creativity, and drives social change. It helps strengthen relationships across ethnic, racial, and generational lines. At the center of education, culture cultivates people who are creative, productive, and independent-minded. It's also a proven economic engine, delivering billions of dollars in economic activity year after year. Culture makes our community a better place to live, which is the key to attracting and retaining people, businesses, and new opportunities. We think of culture as an essential resource for the health and well-being of our*

community – our work matters because culture matters. To invest in our cultural life is to invest in our shared future.

Speaking to our audiences

What follows are examples of how we can adapt the *Power of Culture* platform to address the needs and concerns of specific audiences using customized versions of the general elevator speech. Please note that the *spirit* of what we're saying remains consistent; our goal is to reframe messaging to make the idea of culture – and our role within it – relevant to whomever we're talking to.

AUTHORIZERS

- Who are they? Authorizers are key influencers who have the authority to directly impact the funding for and scope of our work. They include city and state officials, legislators, mayors and selectmen, and other advocacy partners.
- What we do: “By elevating our cultural life, we make our community a better place for your constituents to live, work, and thrive.”
- How we do it: [Our specific roles and responsibilities. What follows is an example that is relevant to a Local Cultural Council.] “Our Local Cultural Council supports the arts, humanities, and sciences through grants, initiatives, and advocacy for nonprofit cultural organizations, schools, and communities. When we have a seat at the table, we make culture part of the conversation about issues important to our community such as municipal redevelopment, economic growth, and education reform.”
- Why it matters: “We believe in the power of culture to strengthen communities, foster creativity and entrepreneurship, and bring about positive change. Culture cuts across ethnic, racial, and generational lines, and helps us raise individuals who are open, creative, and ready to succeed. It drives growth and opportunity, generating millions of dollars in economic activity year after year. Culture makes our community a better place to live, which research shows is key to attracting and retaining people, businesses, and new opportunities. Our work matters because culture matters: to invest in our cultural life is to invest in our future.”

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- Who are they? The business community includes local businesses, employers, real estate developers, the city/regional chamber of commerce, local tourism board, and other significant players in the local economy.
- What we do: “Our work elevates the cultural life of our community, which drives economic growth, creates opportunity, and makes us a more attractive place to live, work, and thrive.”
- How we do it: [Our specific roles and responsibilities as they relate to economic growth and opportunity.]
- Why it matters: “We believe in the power of culture to drive economic growth, foster creativity and entrepreneurship, and transform our community for the better. Our local culture brings millions of dollars into our community year after year, and makes us a better place to live, work, and thrive. Our work matters because our local culture matters: to invest in our cultural life is to invest in our future.”

GENERAL PUBLIC

- Who are they? The general public includes all residents in our community who benefit – directly or indirectly – from our work. They make up the “local” in our local culture: it is their values, their way of life, and their voices that make our community unique and irreplaceable. They can influence authorizers through the ballot and by expressing their opinion in the media.
- What we do: [General description of what we do as cultural agents] “Our work makes our community a better place to live, work, and visit for everyone.”
- How we do it: [Our specific roles and responsibilities. What follows is an example that is relevant to a Local Cultural Council.] “Our Local Cultural Council supports the arts, humanities, and sciences through a wide range of grant programs, partnerships, and initiatives. We want a culture that embraces everyone, that enriches our community, that drives growth and opportunity, and that helps us all become more engaged and creative.”
- Why it matters: “We believe in the power of culture. Culture strengthens our community, fosters creativity, and brings about social change. At the center of education, culture cultivates people who are creative, productive, and independent-minded. It also generates millions of dollars in economic activity every year – money that goes back to you in the form of new jobs, new businesses, and new opportunities for everyone. Most importantly, culture makes our community a better place to live. To invest in our cultural life is to invest in our shared future.”

Section 4: Key terms

Culture

- How we use it: Culture is, in its broadest sense, a shared understanding of our universe and our place within it as expressed through the arts, humanities, and sciences. Culture is an active force and a resource: it connects us, expands our perspectives, and improves our way of life. It incorporates creativity, but it's not limited to creative expression. This is a term we will own and use proudly and consistently across all communications.

Cultural life

- How we use it: Cultural life refers to the experience of culture, the nature and quality of our engagement with the arts, humanities, and sciences. As a cultural organization, we aim to foster a rich cultural life for everyone in our community.

The arts, humanities, and sciences

- How we use it: We define the arts, humanities, and sciences as expressions of culture. Our programs and initiatives engage with culture *through* the arts, humanities, and sciences, and they are all responsible for creating and sustaining our rich cultural life in Massachusetts.

Cultural agent

- How it has been used in the past: In the past, those of us who work in the cultural space have been known as volunteers, members, docents, etc. Though technically accurate, these words don't reflect the value we bring to the cultural life of our communities. Here is where the term "cultural agent" can be substituted.

About Mass Cultural Council

The Mass Cultural Council is a state agency that promotes excellence, inclusion, education, and diversity in the arts, humanities, and sciences to foster a rich cultural life for all Massachusetts residents and contributes to the vitality of our communities and economy.

The Council pursues this mission through a wide range of grants, initiatives, and advocacy for artists, communities, organizations, and schools.