

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Jo-Ann Davis
Sherry Dong
Troy Siebels

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Special Assistant to the Executive Director & Leadership Team

Also present for a very brief portion of the meeting were three members of the public who identified themselves using various names including Elise Cannon, Louise Landfield, Adam Londa, Jack Sorensson, and Don.

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 2:33pm. Deputy Director David Slatery dispensed with reading the Open Meeting Law notice as, at that time, no guests were present.

All members of the Executive Committee were present, and Nina thanked them for making time to participate in this Special Committee Meeting intended to

prepare for the Special Council Meeting scheduled for September 21st at which the full Council will discuss and vote on the Agency's Racial Equity Plan.

Nina then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their last meeting on August 10th and called for a motion to approve them. Troy Siebels moved to approve the minutes. Sherry Dong seconded the motion. All were in favor and it was

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee approves the minutes of the August 10, 2021 Executive Committee Meeting in the form presented to the Executive Committee.

Nina thanked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt and the staff for their hard work on the Racial Equity Plan and stated that she was eager to hear comments from Committee Members today. She noted that she had briefed Troy Siebels and Sherry Dong on the August 24th Council Meeting at which the Plan was discussed by the full Council as they were unable to attend. She then asked Michael to walk the Committee through the Plan.

Michael shared the draft Racial Equity Plan on his screen. A copy of the current draft of the Plan is available upon request. Michael began by stating that there was a concern by a Council Member about the use of the word "decolonization" in the plan. This prompted staff to work to clarify the word as it relates to grantmaking within arts and culture. The Council Member's concern seemed primarily to be concerned with how such term would be interpreted with respect to international issues throughout the globe such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

Michael explained that staff worked to clarify the term decolonization in terms of grantmaking and grants given to the cultural sector and to be sure at each mention within the plan, the tie to grantmaking was clear. Staff has also made efforts to properly educate Agency staff and Council Members on the term and how it applies to grantmaking. When the Plan is next shared with Council Members, it will be accompanied by educational materials focused on decolonization in grantmaking, an hourlong workshop on decolonization in grantmaking will be presented this Friday, September 17th which is open to staff and Council members as a non-deliberative session. At the Council Meeting, Marian Taylor Brown of the Cultural Equity Learning Cohort will speak on decolonization for approximately 10 minutes. Her presentation will be followed by brief remarks from three members of the Native American community who will speak more personally about decolonization and why it is important to them. Michael is also working to invite a representative from Double Edge Theater to speak at the meeting as Double Edge Theater has worked in collaboration with Ohketeau Cultural Center and benefitted greatly from decolonization as part of their work together. Michael met with representatives from both organizations

last week during a cultural tour of Western Massachusetts. After these presentations, there will be time for discussion and then a vote on the Plan.

Nina asked Michael to clarify how Double Edge Theater and the Ohketeau Center work together and if their decolonization work was focused on land reparation or on grantmaking. Michael explained that, generally, each organization decide how to interpret the concept of decolonization in their work. In the case of Double Edge Theater and the Ohketeau Center, Double Edge is a sponsor of Ohketeau. Double Edge possesses a good deal of land, and the Ohketeau Center makes use of it. When Mass Cultural Council talks about decolonization, the term is in reference to diversity in the room during grant panels and other elements that are outlined in the Plan.

Jo-Ann Davis stated that she thinks it is critical to keep the presentation on August 24th focused on how we as an Agency are defining the term. Michael assured Jo-Ann and the rest of the Committee that the way in which Mass Cultural Council defines the term decolonization is made very clear in the Plan. Michael added that to clarify this term has meant an additional 50 hours of work for Agency staff. The vote to approve the Plan still may not be unanimous

At this point, Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner alerted the Committee that four members of the public had entered the waiting room for the meeting. At the direction of the Chair, Ann Petruccelli Moon admitted all four guests to the meeting. Three of them fully joined. The three guests continually changed the names displayed on their Zoom squares. The names included: Adam Londa, Elise Cannon, Jack Sorensson, Louise Landfield, and Don. The fourth member of the public who had entered the waiting room and who was granted admission, Jeremy Fields, appeared to have technical difficulty and never fully joined the meeting. The Committee paused to allow the members of the public to join. Adam Londa remarked that Jeremy Fields should be in the meeting and then acknowledged that he, in fact, was not.

Nina welcomed the members of the public to the meeting and asked if they'd like to share where they were joining from and what their interests were in attending the meeting. Adam Londa stated verbally that Elise Cannon wanted Nina to repeat her question; Elise Cannon had asked this in the chat feature of the Zoom meeting. Nina repeated her welcome remarks and again asked the members of the public if they would like to identify themselves. Adam Londa stated that he owned a juice business. The other two guests did not choose to identify themselves. Nina then asked Deputy Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

While the Open Meeting Law was being read, the guests continued to change their names onscreen. Eventually, one of the guests changed their name to that of Council Chair Nina Fialkow and entered an offensive racial epithet into the chat. Once David finished reading the Open Meeting Law Notice, Adam Londa

verbally commented on the message and asked Nina why she had written it. Vice Chair Marc Carroll stated that he witnessed the guest change their name before the message appeared and that the message had clearly not come from Nina. What was clear was that these members of the public were not attending the meeting in good faith and were, in fact, there to disrupt business and harass Committee Members. Thus, the meeting was ended and restarted a moment later. The disrupting attendees were not readmitted

Once Committee Members and staff had reassembled, the three members of the public who had joined the meeting previously re-entered the waiting room. Staff worked to disable the chat feature and the ability to share screens and video in the Zoom meeting so that once the members of the public were granted admission, they would not be able to continue disrupting the meeting and harassing the Committee Members. While staff did this, the members of the public left the waiting room and never re-joined the meeting.

Committee Members and staff agreed that this disruption was planned by individuals who wished to intentionally behave in an abusive manner and participate in the meeting negatively. Michael then returned to his presentation of the Plan and again shared his screen.

Michael believes the Racial Equity Plan is in good shape and that the concerns of the Council Member have been addressed. The substantial changes include rearranging the document so that the purpose appears at the very beginning of the document. The most major change was to find each mention of decolonization within the plan and ensure that it is clear the term is relating directly to grantmaking within the cultural sector. Michael noted that Council Member Simone Early who is also a member of the Race Equity Task Force had submitted some edits to clarify the mentions of the Council versus the Agency, all of those edits were incorporated into the document. Governor Baker's Executive Order was also added. The link to Wikipedia was removed and replaced, and information relating to the census was updated. Staff also reviewed the Plan with the Agency's legal counsel who advised that the word "equitable" should replace the word "equal" in the Plan.

Nina suggested staff add a note to the Plan stating when the Race Equity Task Force was originally formed.

Sherry Dong asked why in the third paragraph on page four of the plan where it is stated that philanthropy has failed people of color nationally that Black and Latinx are listed together and Native American and Asian are listed separately. Sherry is curious if it might be useful to separate Black and Latinx acknowledging that while they may have overlap, they may also have unique issues. Michael will work to find two separate links to support data around Black and Latinx communities separately. If he is unable to find two separate links the Plan can

move forward, but Sherry feels it would be best to amend the document to include both separately.

Jo-Ann, referencing the goal listed on page nine of the Plan to work to significantly increase grantmaking to BIPOC applicants, asked if the baseline number is known. Do we know what percentage of our grantmaking currently goes to BIPOC applicants? Michael explained that first staff will work to define what constitutes a BIPOC applicant. Then, when organizations and individuals being applying questions will be added to help identify BIPOC applicants. Within one year, the Agency will have a baseline to work from. Nina commented that the challenge may be that many people are reluctant to identify and we want to encourage them to do so. Operations Director Jen Lawless explained that the Agency has asked this question inconsistently and that 70% of Artist grant applicants opted not to answer, so staff is hesitant to give a baseline number. However, this year when the Agency commences using the new grants management system, every user will be asked demographic questions.

Marc suggested that on page five of the plan where a quote from Susan Rice is included to clarify her title as Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy, instead of Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy. Marc added that he believes the Plan is much improved and that the many discussions and clarifications that have been made have greatly strengthened the document.

Michael mentioned that most edits came about in the Executive Summary, not to the action steps. Michael will find two statistics at Sherry's request and send the Plan to the full Council as soon as he has made his final edits so that they can review it in advance of the Special Council Meeting on September 21st. David recommended that in his memo accompanying the Plan, Michael outline the changes that were made and emphasize that the Plan should be read front to back.

Michael asked if the supplemental materials on decolonization he'd shared made sense to the Committee Members and all agreed that they had and helped to contextualize the term. Michael again shared his screen so Committee Members could review the supplemental materials document. Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner suggested adding a date to the top of the document and a date was added.

There was no further feedback and Nina called for the Committee to vote to approve the Racial Equity Plan and recommend it to the full Council for a vote on September 21st. Troy Siebels moved to approve and recommend the Plan. Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. David called the roll, all Committee Members were in favor, none were opposed and it was resolved approve and recommend the Plan to the full Council for a vote on September 21st.

Nina expressed her appreciation to Michael, the staff, and the Task Force for their important work on the Plan and thanked the Committee Members for sharing their thoughts in today's meeting. Next steps will be to share the Plan with the full Council in advance of the Special Council Meeting. As Chair, Nina adjourned the meeting at 3:17pm.