



Creative Potential: Strengthening Arts and Culture Advocacy and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Massachusetts Findings for National Funders and Partners

Authored by Laurie Zapalac
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Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	6
2. Context and Urgency	7
3. Cross-Sector Insights From Interviews and Convenings	8
4. Cross-Sector Collaboration Opportunities	13
5. Strategies for Building Advocacy Infrastructure	20
6. Conclusions	27
Appendix A	28
Appendix B	31

Foreword

In January 2024, the National Endowment for the Arts and the White House Domestic Policy Council co-hosted *Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in Our Communities*, underscoring the essential role of arts and culture in advancing health, economic vitality, and equity.

Building on that momentum, the Barr Foundation launched a discovery process to explore the appetite for cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts—and to understand what it will take to build a more durable, responsive arts and culture advocacy infrastructure. This report reflects what we've heard and learned along the way.

It also reflects Barr's broader commitments: Investing in human, natural, and creative potential; nurturing and protecting community assets; and championing bold ideas that can transform our collective future. We are committed to advancing a more connected and inclusive infrastructure—through relationships, coordination, and trust—and to aligning this work with our refreshed arts strategy, which prioritizes public engagement and sector resilience.

We invite you to help refine and advance the ideas in this report. Its research findings provide a framework for collective thinking and experimentation, and for potential action here in Massachusetts and in other communities. Whatever your role—CEO, policymaker, artist, donor, organizer—you have something vital to contribute.

With a recent sharp rise in financial uncertainty and social and political tensions, this is a moment of both pain and possibility. The sector is under pressure, but there is also renewed energy for collective action. The arts are essential—not only in their own right, but as drivers of public life, belonging, and democracy.

We imagine new collaborations ahead. If something in this report resonates with you, please reach out.

A stronger creative sector begins with stronger connections. Let's build them—together.

San San Wong, *Senior Advisor*

Giles Li, *Program Director*

The Barr Foundation

Executive Summary

Arts, culture, and creativity are central to Massachusetts' identity, economy, and civic life. Yet despite their profound contributions to community well-being and vitality, these sectors remain under-recognized in public policy and under-resourced in systems that shape the Commonwealth's future. This report reflects a year-long discovery process engaging 49 leaders across arts, culture, education, health, housing, workforce development, and policy sectors. Their collective insights point to both an urgent need and a clear path forward for building a stronger, more connected advocacy infrastructure that will sustain and grow arts, culture, and creativity and the creative economy for years to come.

Why This Matters Now

Massachusetts stands at a pivotal moment. The creative sector continues to face persistent challenges—from lingering declines in participation since the pandemic, to rising costs of space and living, to intensifying competition for public attention. At the same time, growing political polarization and financial uncertainty demand new advocacy strategies—ones that recognize and reflect that arts, culture, and creativity have the potential to be more deeply embedded across multiple sectors.

This report's findings make it clear that we cannot advance the role of arts, culture, and creativity through conversations within this sector alone. We must demonstrate their value through active partnerships that show how arts, culture, and creativity contribute directly to innovation, economic competitiveness, health outcomes, workforce readiness, and vibrant communities.

Key Cross-Sector Insights

- **Relationship-Building Is the Foundation of Advocacy.** Coalition building takes time and intention, especially as social divisions and shifting participation patterns reshape how people engage in public life. While we continue strengthening relationships within the sector, we must also be proactive in reaching out across sectors—demonstrating how arts, culture, and creativity can help address shared challenges.
- **Arts, Culture, and Creativity Are Practices of Democracy.** Creative expression fosters civic participation, public dialogue, and equity—serving as a vital tool for addressing complex social issues and strengthening democratic values.
- **Creativity Is a Catalyst for Innovation and Growth.** Massachusetts cannot sustain its leadership in innovation without recognizing that creativity sparks new ideas, attracts and retains talent, addresses social challenges, and propels economic growth. Despite the sector's strengths—and growing recognition of “Big C” creativity as paradigm-shifting thinking that fuels progress across industries—arts, culture, and creative work remain largely absent from the dominant Massachusetts brand and broader narrative.
- **New Approaches to Capital Are Needed.** The sector must pursue diversified financial strategies—combining public investment, trust-based philanthropy, social impact capital, and innovative financing models—to expand the pie and ensure long-term sustainability.

Strategies for Building Advocacy Infrastructure

The following strategies surfaced consistently throughout interviews, convenings, and analysis. They are not presented as a fixed roadmap, but as mutually reinforcing areas of exploration—each addressing core capacities the sector may need to strengthen in order to build a more connected, resilient cross-sector advocacy infrastructure.

These strategic focus areas represent work already underway in some cases, and in others, topics that call for further dialogue and shared design. Detailed in the pages that follow, they include:

- A. Strengthen Sector-Wide Leadership
- B. Support Rapid Response and Crisis Preparedness
- C. Expand Funding and Transform Investment (Making a Bigger Pie)
- D. Enhance Coordination and Information Sharing
- E. Advance Policy Development and Legislative Action
- F. Strengthen Strategic Communications and Public Engagement
- G. Expand Organizing and Grassroots Mobilization

Call to Action

Massachusetts has the creative talent, leadership, and community will to lead the nation in building a more inclusive and sustainable creative sector. What's needed now is a bold investment—of both financial resources and time—to strengthen the infrastructure that connects leaders, equips more people to see advocacy as a shared civic responsibility, amplifies diverse voices, and advances meaningful policy solutions.

This investment can take many forms: Organizations can commit board and staff capacity to advocacy efforts, and the arts can be more intentionally integrated into civic and public leadership. Every actor in the ecosystem has a role to play—no single organization can do it alone.

This is not just about preparing a future workforce or strengthening the creative economy. It's also about cultivating a more civically engaged society—one where young people see creative expression as part of their civic identity and are empowered to help shape the Commonwealth's future.

Massachusetts has the creative talent, leadership, and community will to lead the nation in building a more inclusive and sustainable creative sector.

1. Introduction

In January 2024, the National Endowment for the Arts and the White House Domestic Policy Council co-hosted Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in Our Communities, highlighting the vital role of arts and culture in advancing health, well-being, economic vitality, and equity.

Soon after, the Barr Foundation began a discovery process to explore the appetite and potential for collaboration across the arts and other sectors at the state and local levels—and to identify what is needed to build a durable arts and culture advocacy infrastructure.

Between May and November 2024, the Barr Foundation engaged Laurie Zapalac of Zapalac Advisors and Cuong P. Hoang of Mott Philanthropic to conduct one-on-one interviews with 49 leaders across the arts, education, health, and policy sectors. These interviews, along with three convenings of a core group of arts leaders and targeted supplemental research, inform the findings and recommendations presented in this report. Of note: convenings were held on July 15 and September 16, 2024, and February 4, 2025, bridging the November 2024 presidential election.

Since this work began, the national arts funding landscape has undergone significant upheaval. The Trump administration's proposed 2026 budget calls for the elimination of key federal cultural agencies: the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This proposal has already led to the abrupt cancellation of numerous grants and significant staff reductions across these agencies.

Despite these challenges, many of the ideas shared in interviews and convenings remain highly relevant—some even more so now. A number of initiatives are already moving forward despite headwinds; others will require sustained advocacy and investment. Now more than ever, arts, culture, and creativity are essential to envisioning and building a stronger, more equitable future for the Commonwealth.

This report synthesizes insights from the discovery phase, outlines strategic recommendations, and highlights cross-sector opportunities that emerged through this exploration. It concludes with two appendices: a comparative analysis of the strategies identified in this report alongside the recommendations of the Massachusetts Cultural Economy Advisory Council (CEAC), released on April 30, 2025; and a list of interview and convening participants.

Questions For the Field

This report is both a reflection of past conversations and an invitation to continued collaboration. It aims to put ideas into the hands of leaders across the arts and allied sectors—those already grappling with what it takes to build stronger, more connected advocacy infrastructure in Massachusetts.

We also acknowledge that, even as this report was in production, conditions have continued to evolve and meaningful advocacy efforts have moved forward.

As you review these findings, we invite you to consider:

- What would ideal next steps look like—for the field, for your organization, and for your partners?
- Where do you see opportunities to exercise or support leadership—practical, strategic, or visionary?
- How can we align with or build on existing convenings and initiatives advancing cross-sector collaboration?

- What else is needed to strengthen the field’s advocacy infrastructure and collective impact?
- What strategies can improve collaboration and communication across the public, private (for-profit), and nonprofit sectors, including philanthropy?

We welcome your reflections and hope this report serves as a prompt for deeper dialogue, shared strategy, and collaborative action.

2. Context and Urgency

The Cake, Not Just the Icing: The Essential Role of Arts, Culture, and Creativity

Arts, culture, and creativity are increasingly recognized as critical infrastructure for healthy, vibrant, and equitable communities. They are not merely decorative or entertainment-driven, nor solely tools for tourism—though each of these contributions matters socially and economically. Across Massachusetts, the sector strengthens health and well-being, fuels economic growth, enriches education, supports workforce development, bolsters housing stability, and fosters social cohesion.

As several interviewees noted, the arts are “the cake, not just the icing”—foundational to how communities make meaning, heal, thrive, and envision a better future.

Yet this potential remains underleveraged. Stronger data and more effective storytelling are needed to show how the arts advance community health and cohesion, spark innovation, and catalyze opportunity. Creativity is a core asset in shaping the Massachusetts brand—and must be more prominently positioned as integral to the Commonwealth’s identity and long-term competitiveness.

A Sector Under Strain

The 2025 shift in federal leadership brought existential threats to the arts and culture sector, including the dismantling of the NEA and other key programs. This has triggered funding volatility, workforce disruption, and policy setbacks. At the state level, delayed legislative appropriations—such as those already authorized through the Downtown Vitality Act—have compounded uncertainty. Meanwhile, executive actions targeting DEI initiatives and immigrant communities have destabilized the values and operations of many cultural organizations.

These pressures are already reverberating across Massachusetts, deepening long-standing gaps in funding, infrastructure, and coordination.

Leading statewide voices like MASSCreative, Mass Cultural Council, Mass Humanities, MassDevelopment, MassINC, NEFA, and others continue to play vital roles in highlighting the contributions of the arts, culture, and creativity sector and in advocating for increased investment—but they cannot shoulder this burden alone. A stronger, more resilient advocacy ecosystem will require broader participation, greater alignment across sectors, and stronger coordination from local to state levels.

Signs of Resilience and Innovation

Despite these challenges, the arts, culture, and creativity sector is adapting in promising ways—several of which are explored in more detail in Section 3:

- New cross-sector partnerships with the health, housing, and education sectors
- Creative space stabilization efforts, including cultural land trusts
- Growing interest in social impact investing and place-based funding models

These developments suggest real potential for transformation—but they must be supported and scaled to take hold.

Why Infrastructure and Cross-Sector Partnerships Matter Now

The sector stands at a pivotal moment. Without sustained investment and stronger infrastructure, its progress may stall—or reverse. But with more intentional leadership and cross-sector coordination, Massachusetts can build a creative sector that is more responsive to community needs, more connected to broader civic priorities, and more central to inclusive economic growth.

Getting there will require broader engagement. Major employers—both inside and outside the creative sector—have an important role to play, particularly as they recognize the value of arts and culture in talent development, innovation, and regional vitality.

Deliberate partnerships across sectors can also unlock new funding streams, align policy agendas, and amplify the arts' unique capacity to address complex challenges through storytelling, public engagement, and creative practice.

3. Cross-Sector Insights From Interviews and Convenings

As part of this discovery process, 49 interviews were conducted with leaders from the arts, culture, education, health, housing, workforce, and policy sectors between May and November 2024. These conversations surfaced a range of perspectives on the opportunities and challenges facing the Commonwealth's creative sector, highlighting the need for stronger cross-sector relationships to sustain and expand its impact.

In addition to the specific strategies for strengthening cross-sector advocacy outlined in the following sections, four overarching insights emerged from these interviews. These provide important context for the ideas that follow.

Relationship-Building Is the Foundation of Advocacy

This insight surfaced across nearly every interview. Leaders emphasized that strong, trust-based relationships—both within the arts and culture sector and across other sectors—are essential for effective advocacy. Yet many acknowledged that forging and sustaining these relationships has become more difficult.

Many organizations came together during COVID and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement to meet urgent physical and mental health needs and to show solidarity. But today, participation in cultural organizations and events remains below pre-pandemic levels, limiting the natural opportunities for connection and shared experience that often spark collaboration.

This challenge is further compounded by broader societal shifts: The rise of at-home entertainment options—like streaming platforms and televised sports—has reshaped daily routines and public engagement. At the same time, growing political polarization and heightened social tensions have made some communities more hesitant to gather in public spaces, further complicating efforts to bring people together across differences.

Some leaders emphasized the need to reframe the conversation. As Tiffany Alecia of the Springfield Creative City Coalition noted:

“Places with higher artistic and creative recreational activities have lower crime rates. They have a higher happiness indicator. They have higher social interactions and satisfaction surveys. The outcome isn’t as financial as we’re used to wanting. Is there room to shift our psychology when it comes to this? We need to start quantifiably calculating the qualitative results of things that should be aspirational.”

Others pointed to internal capacity constraints. Many organizations lack the time, staffing, or infrastructure to build relationships beyond immediate tactical needs. As a result, relationship-building often happens reactively—driven by specific goals—rather than as part of a longer-term strategy for community-building or cross-sector collaboration. The absence of regular convening spaces, especially those that span sectors, further limits opportunities for connection. Emily Ruddock of MASSCreative put it this way:

“I still don’t think we have enough folks who are knowledgeable and confident in their advocacy around just the creative sector to be able to effectively engage in those other rooms (like housing) yet. That’s a capacity issue. If we’re going to start showing up at all the Chamber of Commerce breakfasts, we need to be on our game in terms of talking about the creative sector as part of that conversation. That takes some work—right?—and some unifying, coalition-building to do that.”

Understanding these dynamics is critical. It allows for more realistic expectations around coalition-building and supports the design of advocacy infrastructure that can respond to complex, cross-sector challenges. It also underscores the need to intentionally create spaces—both physical and virtual—where relationships can form, deepen, and endure.

In many ways, the work of relationship-building and strengthening sector cohesion mirrors the broader challenges facing our communities—and is essential to overcoming them.

Leaders also emphasized the need for more recurring convenings—forums where advocates can identify shared opportunities, make sense of the current landscape, and build alignment. While some are underway, they are often focused on specific topics or disciplines, limiting their potential to foster broader, cross-sector strategy.

Blair Benjamin, director of Assets for Artists, pointed to the newly formed Mass Artists Services Coalition—a network of leaders and artist-run groups addressing policy issues that affect artists in Massachusetts—as a

promising new infrastructure for coordination. He emphasized that stronger collective organization is essential for tapping into state-level workforce development resources. The challenge ahead, he noted, will be ensuring that these efforts have clear and efficient pathways to inform—and connect with—communications, policymaking, and funding systems.

Arts, Culture, and Creativity Are Practices of Democracy

Many interviewees described arts and culture not simply as reflections of democratic values, but as active practices that foster civic participation, public dialogue, and equity. They highlighted the ways creative expression opens space for diverse voices, encourages public discourse, and helps communities confront complex social issues together.

Kenneth Bailey of the Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI) introduced the concept of public culture as “the enhancement and activation of the public realm as a right.” He called for shaping public spaces as equitable public goods and using creative practices to promote civic discourse and reshape narratives around public infrastructure—making the built environment a canvas for collective expression and dialogue.

Dr. Imari Paris Jeffries of Embrace Boston shared the idea of a festival ecology, emphasizing that equitable cultural representation and community celebrations are fundamental to building social resilience. He framed festivals as a form of civic infrastructure—powerful spaces for equity, belonging, and public participation that bring people together across lines of difference.

Others emphasized that creative spaces are vital arenas for engaging diverse perspectives and advancing equitable solutions. Harold Steward, executive director of the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), urged advocates to embrace bold—and even “messy”—forms of cultural strategy, asking, “How do we get outside of the sector? How do we get uncomfortable?” Steward and others pointed to the importance of cross-sector collaboration—in areas like housing, economic development, and public health—as a way to move beyond reactive advocacy. This approach recognizes that creativity not only responds to societal challenges but can actively shape public policy and systems.

Interviewees highlighted several key themes essential to viewing arts and culture as democratic practices:

- Arts as public culture
- Cultural diplomacy and relationship-building across communities
- Voter engagement and civic participation fostered directly by arts organizations
- Public discourse and dialogue through creative expression
- Cultural workers as movement builders
- Place-based storytelling to honor community identity
- Public art integrated into infrastructure to make civic spaces more inclusive and engaging

Creativity Is a Catalyst for Innovation and Growth

Many interviewees called for a stronger, more cohesive narrative that positions arts, culture, and creativity as central to Massachusetts' identity, economic vitality, and civic life. This work is already underway, with institutions like MassArt playing a leadership role in advancing this narrative—but there is room to do more. To be effective, this narrative should expand beyond the arts sector. It must be demonstrated through active partnerships with other sectors to show how creativity directly contributes to addressing challenges in health, education, community development, and economic growth.

Leaders emphasized that if Massachusetts is to sustain its reputation as a center of innovation, it must also recognize and promote the role of creativity as the foundation for that innovation. Creativity sets the stage for new ideas and inspires the breakthroughs the Commonwealth is known for. While this connection is often understood implicitly, it is rarely named directly—and as a result, the role of arts and culture in driving new thinking and cultural creation is often overlooked or taken for granted.

Interviewees also stressed that advocacy efforts must go beyond data and economic arguments. They must connect emotionally with the public and decision makers by keeping hope, joy, and the vision of a more inclusive future at the center. This includes lifting up stories of resilience, community transformation, and the ways arts and culture bring people together, spark new ideas, and shape the Commonwealth's future.

New Approaches to Capital Are Needed

Interviewees emphasized the need to think more expansively about how financial resources flow to arts, culture, and creativity. While public funding remains essential—and must be protected and expanded—it is not the only tool available. Leaders across the field pointed to a spectrum of capital strategies: from reforming philanthropic practice, to adapting traditional economic development models, to advancing bold, community-governed investment vehicles. Together, these ideas reflect a broader reimagining of resource flows—from extraction to reciprocity, and from transactional to transformational approaches that build long-term sustainability and equity.

Themes that emerged from these discussions included:

- **A Call to Expand Trust-Based Philanthropy.** Many interviewees underscored the importance of evolving philanthropic practices to emphasize stronger, more transparent relationships between funders and organizations. They advocated for reducing administrative burdens on grantees and providing more long-term, unrestricted support, enabling organizations to focus on mission-driven work.
- **Exploring the Role of Incubators and Accelerators.** There was interest in adapting economic development models such as MassChallenge and Boston XChange to support the creative industries. These models combine financial support with mentorship, technical assistance, and professional networks that help creative enterprises grow and strengthen their business foundations.
- **Greater Use of Local Public Funding Mechanisms.** Interviewees noted the potential of leveraging local revenue sources—such as hotel and meals taxes—to support arts and culture, citing examples like New Bedford's Arts, Culture, and Tourism Fund. They also emphasized the value of keeping fund administration at the local level to ensure responsiveness to community needs and place-based development goals.

The New Bedford Arts, Culture, and Tourism Fund was established in 2016 through a home-rule petition enacted by the Massachusetts Legislature and signed into law in early 2017. Proposed by Mayor Jon Mitchell and approved by the City Council, the fund reinvests a portion of local hotel tax revenue into cultural development. It provides up to \$100,000 annually—adjusted for inflation—to support arts organizations, festivals, and creative projects that promote community engagement and tourism. Administered by New Bedford Creative under the New Bedford Economic Development Council, the fund is a model for using local revenue to advance equity, economic vitality, and cultural vibrancy.



Photo courtesy New Bedford Arts, Culture, and Tourism Fund

- **Increasing Attention to Local Impact Investment.** Some interviewees discussed the growing potential of local impact investment funds to channel private and philanthropic capital into creative industries. These models typically aim to blend financial returns with social and cultural impact and can help finance creative spaces, enterprises, and infrastructure. They are often structured and managed by mission-driven investors or community development financial institutions (CDFIs), with a focus on place-based economic development.
- **Growing Interest in Community-Driven and Cooperative Funding Models.** Some interviewees highlighted alternative approaches like the Boston Ujima Project, which pools community resources for shared benefit. These models promote economic justice and collective ownership, offering lessons for building more equitable and resilient local cultural economies. Projects like Ujima go further than many conventional local impact investment models by embedding democratic governance and community accountability at the core of their investment process—shifting not just capital, but decision-making power into historically underinvested communities.

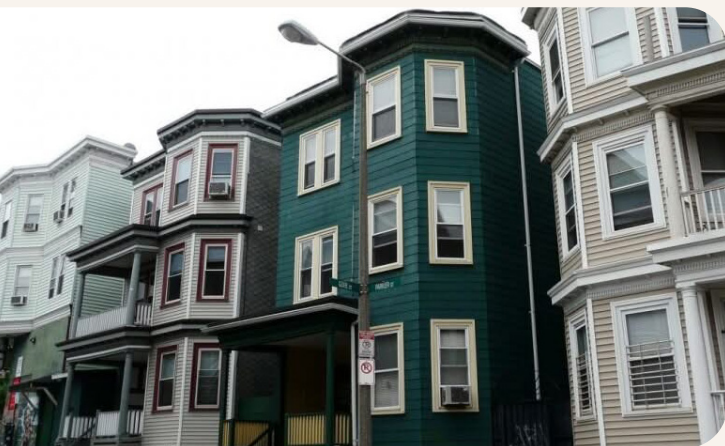


Photo courtesy Boston Ujima Project

The Boston Ujima Project, launched in 2018, is a community-led organization building a cooperative economy grounded in economic justice and self-determination. Through the Ujima Fund—one of the first place-based investment vehicles in the U.S. governed by community members—it directs capital to businesses, real estate, and cultural projects that meet community-defined standards for equity and accountability. Designed to shift economic power into working-class communities of color, Ujima engages a broad base of members in democratic decision making. Alongside its investment work, the project supports cultural organizing, policy advocacy, and mutual aid—offering a national model for community-rooted, arts-integrated economic transformation.

4. Cross-Sector Collaboration Opportunities

Interviewees surfaced a wide range of opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, often grounded in specific programmatic or policy ideas. For discussion purposes during the three convenings, these ideas were organized thematically using the Governor’s cabinet-level secretariats as a framework. However, many naturally cut across multiple categories and were not always directly tied to state funding.

The summaries below reflect the areas where interviewees offered the greatest number of ideas. Some build on existing policies with recommendations for improved implementation; others propose entirely new initiatives. Taken together with the strategies outlined in Section 5, they offer insight into how a broader, more cohesive cross-sector approach could take shape.

Note on Thematic Overlap Across Summaries

The topics discussed below are deeply interconnected. Interviewees often did not view these as siloed concerns, but as interrelated factors that together shape the sustainability of creative work in Massachusetts. For example, space for creative work and housing for creative workers were frequently discussed in tandem, and many economic development ideas emphasized the physical infrastructure needed to support creative enterprise.

Economic and Workforce Development

The intersection of arts and culture with economic and workforce development generated the most ideas from interviewees, reflecting both a clear understanding of the sector’s economic impact and a belief that more can be done to fully leverage that impact. Leaders see significant opportunities to strengthen the creative workforce of the future through intentional policy, targeted investment, and cross-sector collaboration. There was strong interest in positioning creative jobs as economic drivers and integrating creative skill building into broader workforce strategies.

Several interviewees stressed the importance of dispelling the persistent “starving artist” myth and reframing creative careers as viable and valuable across industries. Dr. Marquis Victor of Elevated Thought spoke directly to this point, emphasizing that creative work should be seen as a legitimate and impactful career path, not a marginal or financially precarious choice.

Building on this perspective, many leaders highlighted the need to strengthen support for creative entrepreneurs, makerspaces, and Main Street cultural enterprises as critical components of small business and economic development strategies. These creative enterprises not only generate jobs but also contribute to the vibrancy and resilience of local economies. Dr. Melanie Edwards-Tavares and Julie Gagliardi of the SouthCoast Community Foundation underscored the importance of embedding creative skill building and career development into workforce strategies to prepare workers for success in both creative and cross-sector roles.



Photo courtesy Elevated Thought



Photo courtesy SouthCoast Community Foundation

Interviewees also emphasized the untapped potential of building stronger connections between the creative sector and established growth industries, including technology, biotech, and finance. Geeta Pradhan of the Cambridge Community Foundation called for new messaging that explicitly connects the innovation economy with creativity, also noting that arts and culture play a critical role in attracting and retaining talent. This framing was seen as critical to ensuring Massachusetts' long-term economic competitiveness and reinforcing the central role that creativity plays in driving innovation.

Creative Space and Real Estate

Ensuring the availability of real estate for creatives to live, work, exhibit, rehearse, and perform emerged as a critical cross-cutting theme. Some interviewees approached the issue through the lens of economic development, while others emphasized its importance for advancing equity—particularly in relation to housing access (see the Housing and Livable Communities subsection). As many leaders noted, if creatives cannot afford to live in a community, it becomes far more difficult for them to contribute to its cultural and economic vitality.

The good news is that many interviewees shared innovative ideas for expanding access to creative space. These included developing cultural land trusts and exploring new financing structures to make it easier to repurpose underutilized buildings, especially in Gateway Cities and historically disinvested neighborhoods.

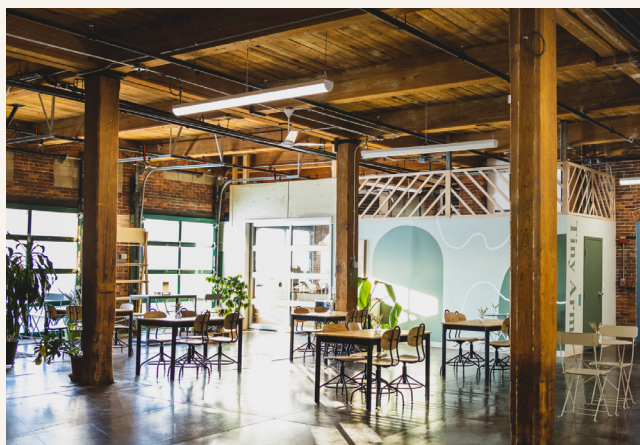
Jim Grace, executive director of the Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston, emphasized the importance of pooled funds and/or intermediary organizations that can provide timely, affordable capital for stabilizing creative space and for the acquisition of space at risk of being sold or lost. He explained:

“What I need in addition to traditional philanthropy is ready access to large amounts of low-cost, flexible, and patient capital—impact investment funds—and I can’t access it quickly enough. I need to move as fast as the real estate market or that of a particular deal. Most sellers will not wait for traditional philanthropy to respond and fund. The key also is that I need to have an experienced real estate counterpart on the funder side ready to provide due diligence services to close on the property in a timely manner. This is about capital flow and is more attuned to system change work—not regular grant making.”

Grace pointed to models like Western Avenue Studios and Lofts in Lowell as examples of how real estate ownership structures can support wealth building, foster small business development, and create vibrant community spaces that include performance venues and incubators for creative enterprises.

Marcos Marrero of MassDevelopment similarly called for new real estate models that combine cultural and commercial uses, including storefront retail, light manufacturing, and creative co-working spaces. He emphasized the need for mission-driven ownership models that prevent displacement and keep creative spaces affordable over the long term. He also stressed the importance of creative clusters and co-working environments designed specifically to support exporting creative products and services to larger markets, helping local artists and makers thrive in a global economy.

Grace, Marrero, and other interviewees underscored that creative space development must be matched with supportive zoning policies, technical assistance, and high-risk financing for buildouts to make these projects viable. Together, their ideas suggest a path forward that blends community wealth building with cultural preservation—securing long-term spaces for creativity to flourish.



Photos courtesy Western Avenue Studios and Lofts

Housing and Livable Communities

Housing affordability and access to community-based cultural spaces were frequently identified as essential to retaining creative workers and preserving the cultural identities of Massachusetts communities. Interviewees pointed to the state's ongoing housing crisis as directly linked to cultural displacement, with rising real estate costs pricing out both individual artists and the organizations that support them. Addressing this challenge, David Weeden of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe stressed the importance of integrating tribal sovereignty and cultural heritage into land use and development planning as a means of supporting long-term cultural sustainability.



Photo courtesy New Bedford Creative

Leaders called for exploring new models to prevent displacement and secure long-term affordability for creative workers. Ideas included the creation of cultural trusts and housing trusts, as well as involving artists and cultural leaders earlier in development processes to shape projects before displacement pressures arise. Ngoc-Tran Vu, artist and cultural organizer, advocated for artist-led land trusts and equitable zoning policies to help preserve cultural spaces and build climate resilience. A.J. Enchill of the Berkshire Black Economic Development Corporation proposed hostel-style housing solutions for transient and visiting artists, offering a way to meet seasonal demand for artist accommodations without distorting local housing markets.

Others, including Derek Santos from the New Bedford Economic Development Council and Margo Sauliner of New Bedford Creative, emphasized the opportunity to incorporate creative spaces and cultural elements into housing redevelopment projects supported by decarbonization and environmental funds. This approach ties space stabilization and community identity efforts to broader climate and sustainability initiatives.

Key themes that emerged from these conversations include creative housing solutions, artist-led development, cultural placekeeping, community identity, anti-displacement strategies, and partnerships with community development corporations (CDCs) to secure space for arts and culture within broader community development efforts.

Education and Creative Youth Development

Interviewees consistently affirmed that creative skills offer a critical competitive advantage for the Commonwealth's innovation economy, particularly as industries increasingly value adaptability, collaboration, and creative problem solving. Several leaders stressed the need to build stronger creative pipelines through expanded arts education, afterschool programs, and the integration of creative learning into K–12 systems.



Photo courtesy EdVestors

“[Arts integration] programs can provide a career pathway—creating opportunities for youth to see a future in Massachusetts rather than going elsewhere,” observed Nicole Olusanya of EdVestors, who emphasized the importance of embedding creative learning early—starting in middle school—to help students see viable futures in creative careers. She also called for expanding internship programs, including partnerships with nonprofits and for-profit companies, to expose young people to real-world creative industries and equip them with practical skills. Just as critical, she argued, is ensuring that teaching artists earn living wages, allowing them to sustain their careers and reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Creativity, according to Dr. Marquis Victor of Elevated Thought, is foundational to critical thinking and workforce readiness.

He advocated for developing apprenticeship programs with major employers—citing companies like New Balance—that would connect young people directly to career pathways in the creative economy. Building on this idea, Josh Bhatti of The Bowery Presents pointed to the Shout Syndicate as a model for creative industry philanthropy that invests directly in youth development. By channeling a portion of ticket sales and private donations from the music industry into creative youth programs, the initiative bridges the nonprofit and for-profit sectors to cultivate the next generation of creative talent.

For older students, particularly those navigating higher education, the arts can play a transformative role. Dr. Pam Eddinger of Bunker Hill Community College described the arts as civic infrastructure for college students, especially first generation and BIPOC learners, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and personal agency during critical developmental years.

Preparing creatives for successful careers also requires demystifying the business side of creative work. Mary Grant of MassArt highlighted advocacy training and new certificate programs focused on creative entrepreneurship, helping artists navigate financial sustainability and the realities of running a creative business. In the same vein, J. Cottle of Dunamis underscored the importance of marketing and business development, encouraging artists to embrace the mindset that “marketing is finding your audience”—a critical skill for sustaining creative careers.

These ideas emphasize not only the role of creativity in building a future workforce, but also its importance in preparing young people to be engaged citizens and to realize their full personal potential.



Photo courtesy Bunker Hill Community College

Health and Community Well-Being

Arts practices were widely recognized as powerful tools for mental health support and community healing, particularly in marginalized communities where traditional care models may not fully meet emotional and cultural needs. Leaders cited the role of arts in trauma recovery, mental health access, and the creation of spaces for collective healing.

Daniel Callahan, a multimedia artist, described how storytelling, rap, and visual arts serve as non-traditional tools for building mental resilience in Black communities. He shared examples of creative programs he co-developed that focus specifically on mental health and resilience through artistic expression. He offered this powerful insight about his work with young men:

“We use art to allow people to express themselves, to tell their own stories, but then also to recontextualize those stories so that they’re platforms for finding out more about themselves and growing, instead of traps that keep them stuck... By being able to show people how to not only tell their stories, but also to recontextualize their stories in ways that are more effective, we can promote people to move past trauma and continue to mature and get to that manhood that they really want to get to.”

Bora Chiemruom of the Angkor Dance Troupe discussed her organization’s partnership with the Lowell Community Health Center, integrating cultural healing practices into healthcare services to better serve immigrant and refugee communities. Margo Saulnier of New Bedford Creative emphasized the critical role artists played during moments of community trauma—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the George Floyd protests—advocating for formalized roles for artists in community trauma response initiatives.



Photo courtesy Angkor Dance Troupe

Many interviewees pointed to Massachusetts’ newly launched social prescribing model, CultureRx, as a promising strategy for integrating the arts into healthcare systems to promote both mental health and social cohesion. Dr. Lisa Wong—pediatrician, musician, and longtime advocate for arts in health—underscored the

importance of building cross-sector infrastructure to support this work. She noted that while social prescribing is an exciting development, it also brings real challenges that require thoughtful navigation. She explained:

“What is most important for Massachusetts—having emerged as a leader in this exciting field—is to continue aligning motivation across sectors: from educating our healthcare providers, artists, and insurers to promoting collaboration, all while engaging with and listening to the community’s needs.”

Other key themes included the role of the arts in healing and trauma recovery, non-traditional care models, improved mental health access, and public health strategies that incorporate creative aging and long-term wellness approaches.

Financial Capital and Investment

Interviewees frequently highlighted the need for more innovative and equitable capital strategies to support the creative sector, particularly in historically under-resourced communities. This was one of the few areas where some ideas were tied directly to state and local appropriations, while others focused on accessing alternative sources of capital—including philanthropy, private investment, and community-driven financial models.

Dr. Makeeba McCreary of the New Commonwealth Fund emphasized that achieving financial equity also requires strengthening financial literacy and providing more culturally relevant capacity-building opportunities. She noted, “We did a convening with a lot of nonprofit leaders, and we asked them to design the kind of professional development they would want, and one of the items was how to play the game. Another topic was, ‘I need it to be okay that I don’t know what I don’t know.’” This highlights the importance of pairing new capital strategies with tools that help creatives and cultural organizations confidently navigate financial systems and investment opportunities.



Photo courtesy New Commonwealth Fund

McCreary also called attention to the structural barriers individual artists face when attempting to access philanthropic resources, noting that the nonprofit model is often an ill fit for creatives. “I am the first one to tell somebody, don’t incorporate, just find a fiscal sponsor,” she explained, underscoring the need for more accessible fiscal sponsorship options. Without such pathways, many independent artists remain locked out of critical funding opportunities simply because they lack the formal nonprofit status often required by funders.

Models such as the Boston Ujima Project and the New Commonwealth Fund were cited as promising examples of how pooled resources and democratic investment strategies can strengthen local economies and create sustainable funding pathways for creative enterprises. These approaches prioritize not only financial return but also cultural preservation, social equity, and community wealth building—values that align closely with the goals of the creative economy.

Interviewees also discussed the value of creative financing structures that help capitalize projects without requiring traditional debt financing or direct payments. Examples included forgivable loans, public–private partnerships, and financial models that incorporate intermediary organizations to negotiate more favorable terms for creative tenants and partners. These strategies help reduce financial barriers while still enabling critical development in the creative sector.

Together, these ideas highlight both the breadth of opportunities for advancing the creative sector and the need for intentional, well-supported infrastructure to turn ideas into action. The following section outlines the specific strategies identified through this process to build lasting partnerships, strengthen advocacy efforts, and advance the policy and investment solutions needed to realize this vision.

5. Strategies for Building Advocacy Infrastructure

Building on the cross-sector ideas outlined above, this section summarizes a set of strategies that emerged through the discovery process. While the previous section explored what kinds of cross-sector collaboration are needed, the strategies here focus on how to build the infrastructure that makes such collaboration possible.

Importantly, these are not formal recommendations, but working ideas surfaced through interviews and convenings—intended as a starting point for further discussion, alignment, and refinement.

These strategies address both near-term needs and long-term opportunities to strengthen a more resilient, connected, and influential advocacy ecosystem—one capable of advancing community well-being, equity, and economic vitality across the Commonwealth.

The strategies are organized into seven core focus areas, reflecting the need for a multifaceted approach to the complex and evolving challenges facing the sector. For a comparison with the Massachusetts Cultural Economy Advisory Council (CEAC) recommendations released in April 2025, see Appendix A.

A. Strengthen Sector-Wide Leadership

Interviewees identified a range of strategies to strengthen leadership at the policy, network, and organizational levels.

- **Ensure strong representation at the policymaking table**
 - **Establish a state-level Arts and Culture Secretary** to elevate the sector’s policy voice and secure a permanent seat in public decision making.
 - **Position trusted arts and culture advisors** within key issue areas such as housing, infrastructure, and transportation, as part of a coordinated, cross-sector leadership approach.
 - **Strengthen collaboration with elected leaders**—including the governor, lieutenant governor, and key members of the Massachusetts Legislature—by developing a targeted communication and engagement strategy around the Creative Sector’s Legislative Agenda.
 - **Invest in research tailored to specific electoral districts** to demonstrate how creative sector priorities contribute to local economic development, education, health, and overall community well-being.
 - **Engage organizations such as MassINC and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)** to support data analysis, mapping, and messaging that connects policy goals to district-level outcomes.
- **Invest in organizational capacity and leadership development**
 - **Define resilient organizational operation**, including the role of pay equity and granting approaches in supporting operational continuity.
 - **Assess and address risks facing key organizations** to ensure they can withstand leadership and funding transitions.
- **Foster alignment and shared strategy across the sector**
 - **Convene annual statewide cross-sector gatherings** to build relationships, identify shared priorities, and align advocacy efforts. (See related strategies D, F, and G that follow.)
 - **Leverage existing directories such as Creative Ground and other platforms** to strengthen statewide advocacy networks and improve communication across organizations.

B. Support Rapid Response and Crisis Preparedness

Interviewees and convening participants emphasized the need for flexible, rapid-response capacity to help the arts and creativity sector navigate legal, financial, reputational, and workforce shocks—especially amid growing political and economic volatility.

But the need for preparedness goes beyond the current political moment. Crises can take many forms—from public health emergencies to natural disasters to abrupt funding shifts. Whatever advocacy infrastructure is built must be nimble, coordinated, and ready to respond across a range of scenarios.

Importantly, this is not just about ensuring the flow of emergency funds. It’s about cultivating readiness: having trusted intermediaries and cross-sector partners in place who can help strategize responses, communicate effectively, and take coordinated action when disruptions occur. Resilience requires strength at all levels—from small artist-led groups to large institutions—and recognizes that vulnerabilities can emerge anywhere in the system. Redundancy, distributed leadership, and proactive coordination are all essential components of a more durable and responsive advocacy infrastructure.

These strategies don't just strengthen crisis response—they also reinforce the sector's collective advocacy capacity. By ensuring that organizations and networks are supported during times of stress, we protect the voices, relationships, and operational stability that advocacy depends on. Ideas surfaced in these discussions, some of which are already underway, include:

- **Identify and fund intermediaries to manage rapid-response resources.** These may include arts-focused organizations or intermediaries from adjacent sectors (e.g., legal, accounting, or housing). Some may be located outside Massachusetts and may need capacity building to serve the sector effectively.
- **Support cross-sector collaboration with basic needs organizations.** Partner with housing, food, health, and employment support agencies to ensure they understand and are equipped to meet the specific needs of arts and culture workers. This work can also help cultivate allies beyond the sector.
- **Provide targeted training and technical assistance.** Help organizations prepare for attacks or instability by offering cybersecurity audits, legal and financial readiness training, and communications strategy support—building on nonprofit technical assistance models addressing security and legal vulnerabilities like those implemented during the first Trump administration.
- **Offer limited on-call expert support through 2025.** Provide rapid access to legal, financial, and operational guidance to help organizations navigate immediate disruptions or funding gaps.

C. Expand Funding and Transform Investment (Making a Bigger Pie)

Interviewees and convening conversations emphasized that the sector must look beyond traditional public funding to pursue a broader spectrum of financial strategies. Especially in a time of fiscal uncertainty, new approaches are needed to align philanthropic, private, and public capital in support of a resilient creative economy.

Key recommendations include:

- **Update models of financial resilience for creative organizations.** Redefine what it means to be a resilient arts organization by emphasizing structural flexibility, diversified revenue streams, and a healthy tolerance for risk. Collaborate with trust-based philanthropic partners to develop grantmaking approaches that reflect the operational realities and capacity-building needs of the field. Pilot efforts—such as those led by MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative (MassDev TDI) and the SouthCoast Community Foundation—are already testing new frameworks. The Art & Business Council of Greater Boston, through its Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts program, also provides guidance on alternative legal and fiscal structures.
- **Advance cross-sector investment partnerships.** Drive funding innovation by convening local leaders involved in place-based impact investing, including:
 - The Essex County Community Foundation's Place-Based Impact Investing Initiative
 - New Commonwealth Fund
 - Boston Ujima Project
 - Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston
 - MA Arts Funders Network
 - Boston XChange

These efforts could intersect with broader capital strategies, including the Conservation Law Foundation’s Healthy Neighborhoods Equity Fund and the work of community development corporations (CDCs) and community development financial institutions (CDFIs).

- **Identify and address geographic and programmatic gaps.** The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), or a similar regional data partner, could lead mapping efforts—using geographic information system (GIS) technology to identify underfunded areas and align future investments with community needs.
- **Secure and stabilize creative space.** Support real estate strategies like cultural land trusts and pooled capital models being led by the Art & Business Council of Greater Boston and others working to protect affordable, long-term creative space.
- **Support for-profit creative enterprise investment.** Expand convenings to connect for-profit creative entrepreneurs with funders, modeled after the Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF) “venture days” approach to local social enterprise.
- **Promote broad-based impact investing literacy.** Build on the work of ECCF and others to educate communities, individual investors, and institutions on how to engage in local impact investing as a tool for cultural and economic resilience.

D. Enhance Coordination and Information Sharing

Coordination and information sharing need to evolve from bilateral exchanges to a more integrated, sector-wide approach. Expanding opportunities for shared communication can uncover new avenues for collaboration and alignment—while also strengthening relationships across the field.

When it comes to cross-sector partnerships, a narrowly strategic approach that prioritizes certain sectors may be too limiting. Instead, an open and responsive stance is encouraged—directing time and resources toward sectors, individuals, and organizations that actively show up, engage, and demonstrate readiness to collaborate.

Ideas that emerged include:

- **Support organizations that are actively monitoring developments at the federal and state levels that impact the arts and creativity sector in Massachusetts.** These organizations play a critical role in tracking policy changes and potential actions in response to emerging issues. Efforts should focus on ensuring that arts and culture leaders are kept informed in real time, recognizing that policy developments are likely to continue at a rapid pace. Collaboration with organizations monitoring developments in other sectors—such as education and public health—can also help identify broader policy trends that affect the arts and creativity sector.
- **Convene arts and creativity leaders on a regular basis to strengthen coordination and collaboration.** These gatherings can build on existing networks with modifications to broaden participation and share leadership responsibilities, reducing reliance on any single organization to serve as the primary convener. Additional participants should include organizations and individuals actively engaged in advocacy efforts, as well as those identified through ongoing information-sharing activities and emerging as highly engaged sector leaders.

These convenings should focus on identifying opportunities for collaboration, advancing shared policy priorities, and coordinating action on key issues—such as advocating for specific legislation. A shared strategic framework can help structure and guide these discussions.

- **Maximize the impact of planned convenings**, whether focused on specialized topics (e.g., intersections of arts and health) or broader sector-wide issues. Participation in these events can help surface new strategic opportunities and leadership potential. Where appropriate, funding could be linked to convening activities that directly support the strengthening of the arts and creativity advocacy infrastructure, including delivery of targeted training or skill-building sessions aligned with key sector priorities.
- **Clarify and engage the full range of constituencies within the creative ecosystem.** To strengthen coordination, the sector must deepen its understanding of who makes up the Massachusetts creative ecosystem and how best to engage them. This includes coming to terms with the breadth and dynamism of the ecosystem’s composition. Interviewees suggested that mapping the ecosystem across three dimensions could be particularly useful:
 - **Creative industry subgroup**—such as performing arts, culinary arts, media, literary arts, and others
 - **Sector type**—including public, private, and nonprofit (encompassing philanthropy, mission-based organizations, and nonprofit academic institutions)
 - **Supporting partners**—such as businesses that serve creative enterprises (including lenders), arts education entities, and philanthropic donors

This kind of mapping can surface gaps in representation, reveal potential partners, and help the field mobilize more strategically across shared goals.

- **Advance research and data-sharing initiatives** that enable smaller organizations to demonstrate their contributions to the broader ecosystem and strengthen their case for support.
- **Expand research and initiatives related to workforce development**, including to explore how AI may impact jobs, including creative work, in Massachusetts; as well as broader definitions of creative economy jobs and the sector’s contributions to Massachusetts’ economy.

E. Advance Policy Development and Legislative Action

Interviewees emphasized that the arts, culture, and creativity sector must play a more active and visible role in shaping public policy—not only through legislative advocacy, but also by influencing how policies are designed, implemented, and evaluated. The emphasis here is on strengthening all stages of the policy process, from idea generation and alignment, to drafting and passage, to implementation and impact tracking.

Recommendations focus on building the sector’s capacity to contribute meaningfully across this full spectrum—ensuring that creative sector perspectives are present in key policy conversations and that enacted policies translate into real-world results.

Key recommendations include:

- **Build out the sector’s policy bench.** Support personnel or “connective tissue” roles that can unify advocacy efforts, coordinate across organizations, and contribute to broader communication and strategy.
- **Track and engage with advocacy convenings.** Monitor meetings of legislative and policy staff across major arts organizations to identify shared priorities, build alignment, and reduce duplication of effort.

- **Ensure implementation of enacted legislation.** Engage with public agencies around program criteria, help applicants access funds, and serve as a watchdog to track outcomes. Interviewees specifically cited the Downtown Vitality Act as a near-term opportunity to support implementation and demonstrate sector-wide coordination.
- **Support platforms for collective imagination.** Interviewees expressed interest in spaces where leaders can explore long-term policy ideas—such as alternative funding models, new ownership structures, or sector-wide goals—beyond immediate legislative priorities. This includes convenings that lift up emerging conversations already underway and help them reach a broader audience.
- **Engage with administrative and private-sector policy.** Policy work must extend beyond legislation. Examples shared by interviewees included administrative commitments (e.g., to arts education staffing) and incentives for private developers to prioritize cultural benefits in real estate projects.

F. Strengthen Strategic Communications and Public Engagement

Interviewees noted that the creative sector continues to struggle with fragmented messaging—both in defining its own value and in connecting arts and culture to broader narratives about the Commonwealth. While a single unifying message may be unrealistic, there is a clear need for compelling, adaptable frames that resonate across audiences, issues, and moments.

With a growing body of messaging research already in circulation—particularly in response to shifting national dynamics—the sector has an opportunity to amplify and tailor existing insights to its unique context. This includes more effectively communicating the role of creative expression as a practice of democracy (see Section 3). Importantly, interviewees emphasized that messages must not only be crafted—they must be tested and refined through use, ensuring they are resonant, relevant, and ready for deployment in real-world advocacy.

To address these challenges, interviewees recommended the following strategies:

- **Establish a communications hub position** to support sector-wide messaging and capacity. This role would act as a shared resource—curating messaging guidance, sharing strategy briefs, and providing editorial and technical assistance, particularly to smaller organizations without dedicated communications staff.
- **Convene communications directors and practitioners** across the creative sector. Regular gatherings would enable peer learning, lift up emerging narratives, and support coordination around key advocacy issues.
- **Develop joint training and professional development opportunities.** Training should address both technical skills (e.g., media relations, digital strategy) and strategic communication—helping organizations understand how their voice contributes to a stronger sector-wide narrative. The communications hub could help design and facilitate these offerings.
- **Undertake collaborative communications research.** A shared research effort—such as polling, message testing, or landscape scans—could generate actionable insights and serve as an advisory platform for deeper relationship building. Partners like MassINC could help support this work.

G. Expand Organizing and Grassroots Mobilization

Organizing and mobilizing constituencies is a vital expression of power and influence. Over the past decade, the creative sector has significantly advanced this capacity—developing and organizing around a statewide legislative agenda, establishing the MASSCreative Action Network, and expanding events like Creative Advocacy Week and the Artist Town Halls. Still, much of this work remains focused on contacting legislators around targeted pieces of legislation or sector engagement in select mayoral races.

More recently, efforts like the Creative Sector Summit—launched in 2024 and held again on June 6, 2025—reflect a broader focus on advocacy infrastructure and cross-sector issues, including health and disability rights, workers' rights, and climate. These events, along with a growing number of convenings hosted by partner organizations, have helped launch important conversations and relationships. The key challenge now is how to carry this momentum forward—ensuring the excitement and ideation generated can be effectively channeled into a sustained advocacy framework and advanced toward systemic outcomes.

Interviewees emphasized that the sector's advocacy infrastructure must both broaden the constituencies it organizes and expand the tools and tactics it uses to engage them.

Deeper engagement with elected officials is a critical step—potentially addressed through reactivating the cultural caucus or building a network of pro-arts mayors.

As noted in strategic focus D (Enhance Coordination and Information Sharing), organizing efforts would also benefit from more comprehensive research to better define the sector's composition. Such analysis could help identify key individuals and organizations who, while already active in related issue areas, are not yet connected to broader creative sector or cross-sector advocacy efforts.

Related to organizing and grassroots mobilization, interviewees recommended the following strategies:

- **Continue to connect creative sector stakeholders with opportunities to use their skills in support of broader advocacy efforts**—such as defending democracy or protecting government programs like Medicaid. These actions not only offer new avenues for engagement but also allow creative sector advocates to practice and expand their organizing tactics. In doing so, they can build stronger relationships and alliances with other movements and sectors. To increase visibility and solidarity, the sector might also consider developing a recognizable brand identity—much like the purple shirts of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) or the pink hats associated with women's rights advocacy—to signal a unified presence in public and political spaces.
- **Organize around a broader set of policy issues** that are connected to but not mainly focused on the sector. One example concerns the Municipal Empowerment Act, which, among other things, allows municipalities greater latitude to increase taxes on certain items or activities, which could be directed locally to the arts and creativity sector. This would further build allies in other sectors.
- **Provide trainings specific to artists and creatives** to organize and mobilize in ways that engage the distinctive strengths of artists and creatives. A potential partner for these trainings could be the Center for Arts Activism (C4AA) or Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI). The sector might also consider trainings aimed at online influencers and creatives. Trainings might be provided to prepare for a specific purpose, such as Creative Sector Advocacy Week.
- **Integrate tools that are prevalent in the civic engagement field**, which has already made significant investments in the science of organizing and mobilizing. For example, Empower Project is providing national leadership in relational organizing. It rewards (pays) volunteers who engage people in their existing

networks by disseminating key messages throughout the arc of a campaign. The Massachusetts Voter Table has access to the voter file and modeling tools, which could be utilized to analyze existing arts donors to identify those who are also political donors.

- **Create a playbook** to build advocacy infrastructure/communications through already-scheduled events.
- **Use geographic information system (GIS) technology to map and visualize the existing advocacy network ecosystem.** Include assets such as MASSCreative Fellows, TDI Fellow locations, Cultural Districts, leading organizations, and other relevant efforts. Create discrete strategies to fill geographic coverage gaps across all 351 Massachusetts cities and towns. This work could be led by MAPC and integrated with other mapping initiatives identified in this report.

6. Conclusions

We are deeply grateful to the many leaders, organizers, artists, policymakers, educators, and advocates who contributed to this report. Their insights, experiences, and bold ideas shaped every dimension of this work.

What emerges from their contributions is clear: Massachusetts has the talent, vision, and momentum to build a more inclusive, innovative, and resilient creative sector. Arts, culture, and creativity are not extras—they are essential to our civic vitality, economic strength, and community well-being.

This is a pivotal moment to advance investment in leadership, in bold, purpose-driven communication, and in a culture of collaboration—essential to building a creative sector that is more connected, more resilient, and better equipped to serve the people of Massachusetts.

The strategies outlined here are not a finished roadmap, but an invitation to organize, to align, and to invest in the systems and relationships that will carry this work forward. No single organization can build this future alone. But together, we can strengthen the advocacy infrastructure our sector needs—and ensure that creativity remains at the heart of a vibrant, equitable Commonwealth.

Appendix A

This Report's Recommendations Compared to Policy Recommendations of the Massachusetts Cultural Policy Development Council

This appendix includes a summary of the strategies identified in this report shown in comparison with Massachusetts Cultural Economy Advisory Council (CEAC) recommendations released April 30, 2025.

Each of these sets of recommendations reflects an approach to strengthening the creative sector—rooted in different policy environments but addressing many of the same underlying challenges. When compared side by side, it becomes possible to identify points of alignment, highlight complementary strategies, and surface gaps where further policy or programmatic innovation may be needed.

This comparison is not intended to suggest that one framework should replace another. Rather, it offers a way to understand how Massachusetts can build on current momentum, learn from promising practices in other states, and strengthen cross-sector collaboration to advance shared goals for the creative economy.

It may be valuable to further compare these sets with the recommendations identified in the *Creatives Rebuild New York NYS Policy Playbook* released October 2024.

APPENDIX A, TABLE 1

Comparative Summary of Strategies

Policy Focus Area	Massachusetts CEAC Policy Recommendations	Advocacy Infrastructure Building Strategies Identified in This Report
Defining and Elevating the Creative Sector	Rec 1: Define Cultural Economy: <i>Map the cultural economy and standardize a definition</i>	D. Enhance Coordination and Information Sharing: <i>Clarify and engage the full range of constituencies within the creative ecosystem</i> G. Expand Organizing and Grassroots Mobilization: <i>Use GIS to map and visualize the existing advocacy network ecosystem</i>
Public Leadership and Government Integration	Rec 2: Elevate Arts, Humanities, and Culture Within State Government: <i>Encourage cross-sector partnerships and integrate arts professionals directly into state government</i>	A. Strengthen Sector-Wide Leadership
Capital Investment and Space Stabilization	Rec 3: Establish Capital Initiatives to Support Downtown Revitalization and Space Preservation: <i>Review capital authorizations and explore public-private partnerships</i>	C. Expand Funding and Transform Investment (Making a Bigger Pie)
Financial Sustainability and Revenue	Rec 4: Identify Permanent Sustainable Revenue Stream: <i>Convene a group to discuss the plausibility of a sustainable, consistent revenue stream for arts, humanities, and culture</i>	C. Expand Funding and Transform Investment (Making a Bigger Pie)
Workforce Development	Rec 5: Promote Business Acumen and Workforce Development for Creative Workers: <i>Explore ways to develop educational pathways for artists and cultural workers</i>	D. Enhance Coordination and Information Sharing: <i>Expand research and initiatives on workforce development</i> A. Strengthen Sector Wide Leadership: <i>Build sector leadership to support workforce policy</i>
Financial Security and Crisis Resilience	Indirectly addressed through partnerships with social services but no dedicated financial security programs	B. Support Rapid Response and Crisis Preparedness
Community Engagement and Visibility	Implicit throughout, especially in elevating arts in state policy and workforce development	F. Strengthen Strategic Communications and Public Engagement G. Expand Organizing and Grassroots Mobilization
Policy Development and Legislative Action	Implicit throughout, particularly through Recs 2 and 5	E. Advance Policy Development and Legislative Action

Summary notes:

The CEAC framework offers policy-focused strategies aimed at advancing the creative sector through legislative, administrative, and financial reforms. In contrast, this report focuses more broadly on strengthening the full advocacy infrastructure necessary to support, sustain, and activate policy goals over time. While the approaches differ, there is clear alignment in several key areas:

- **Leadership development and sector visibility.** Both emphasize the importance of elevating the role of arts and culture in public life and policymaking.
- **Financial sustainability and investment.** Both recognize the need for new and diversified funding streams. CEAC proposes dedicated public revenue and capital investment strategies, while this report focuses on the organizing and advocacy work required to achieve those financial reforms.
- **Workforce development.** CEAC highlights workforce development policies. This report complements those efforts by calling for expanded research in workforce development.
- **Data, coordination, and information sharing.** Both recognize the importance of strong data and coordination platforms to inform decision making and foster collaboration. While CEAC calls for data collection at the policy level, this report addresses how advocacy networks can better share information, coordinate action, and amplify collective impact.

Appendix B

Interview and Convening Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of arts and culture leaders, as well as leaders from other sectors actively engaged with arts, culture, and creativity. The goal was to understand their perspectives on the current state of arts and culture advocacy infrastructure and the potential to strengthen cross-sector approaches.

The primary question asked: *What do you see as the top three opportunities for the arts and culture sector to access new resources from state and local sources that are not explicitly dedicated to the arts?*

Based on responses, follow-up questions were posed to further explore key ideas.

Individuals listed in Table 1 also participated in these interviews, as well as in three convenings to discuss the findings from interviews and to identify possible steps in the advocacy infrastructure building process. Individuals listed in Table 2 participated in interviews only.

APPENDIX B, TABLE 1

Interview and Convening Participants

NAME	TITLE, ORGANIZATION
Kara Elliott-Ortega	Chief of Arts and Culture, City of Boston
Lisa Wong	Physician/Musician, co-director of Arts and Humanities Initiative, Harvard Medical School
Emily Ruddock	Executive Director, MASS Creative
Harold Steward	Executive Director, New England Foundation for the Arts
Annis Sengupta	Executive Director, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Marc Draisen	Director of Arts and Culture, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Alex Pascal	Senior Fellow, Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation, Kennedy School of Government
Michael Bobbitt	Executive Director, Mass Cultural Council

APPENDIX B, TABLE 2

Additional Interview Participants

NAME	TITLE, ORGANIZATION
Nicole Olusanya	Director, PBS Arts Expansion, EdVestors
Marcos Marrero	EVP, Community Development, MassDevelopment
Joyce Linehan	Commissioner, Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners; Talent Producer; Assistant to the President for Special Projects, MassArt
Brian Boyles	Executive Director, Mass Humanities
Joe Kriesberg	CEO, MassINC
Geeta Pradhan	President and CEO, the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts
Megan Burke <i>(Responses by email)</i>	President, Cambridge Community Foundation
Mary Grant	President, MassArt
Karen Ristuben	Program Director, Creative County, Essex County Community Foundation
Dr. Melanie Edwards-Taveres	President and CEO, SouthCoast Community Foundation
Julie Gagliardi	Director of Programs, SouthCoast Community Foundation
Andre Leroux	Author, MassINC
Jim Grace	CEO, Boston Art and Business Council
Kassie Infante	Associate Director of Operations, Abundant Housing Massachusetts

APPENDIX B, TABLE 2 (continued)

Additional Interview Participants

NAME	TITLE, ORGANIZATION
Cait Brumme	CEO, MassChallenge
Jameson Johnson	Co-Founder/Executive Editor, Boston Art Review
Josh Bhatti	Manager, The Bowery Presents
Chris Sherman	CEO, Island Creek Oysters
Kerri Hoffman	President and CEO, PRX
Joy Allen	Chair, Music Therapy, Berklee College of Music
Brendan Ciecko	Founder/CEO, Cuseum
Vin Cipolla	CEO, Historic New England
Blair Benjamin	Founder/Director, Assets for Artists
Derek Santos	Executive Director, New Bedford Economic Development Council
Margo Saulnier	Creative Strategist and Director of Arts-Based Initiatives, New Bedford Economic Development Council
Margy Waller	Planning Consultant and Senior Fellow, Topos Partnership
Daniel Callahan	Multimedia Artist and Designer
David Weeden	Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Mashpee Wampanoag
A.J. Enchill	Executive Director, Berkshire Black Economic Development Council
Dr. Imari Paris Jeffries	President and CEO, The Embrace
Kenneth Bailey	Founder/Methodology and Strategy Director, DS4SI
Dr. Marquis Victor	Founder/Executive Director, Elevated Thought; Artist
J. Cottle	Executive Director, Dunamis Boston; Artist
Tiffany Allecia	Executive Director, Springfield Creative City Coalition
Bora Chiemruom	Executive Director, Angkor Dance Troupe
Luis Cotto	Program Manager, TDI Creative Cities, City of Lynn
Ngoc-Tran Vu	Artist and Cultural Organizer; Consultant, Tran Vu Arts
Dr. Pam Eddinger	President, Bunker Hill Community College
Jeremy Liu	Managing Director, Creative Partners Development
Kai Grant	Founder and Chief Curator, Black Market
Dr. Makeeba McCreary	President and CEO, New Commonwealth Fund



**Creative Potential: Strengthening
Arts and Culture Advocacy and
Cross-Sector Collaboration**

**Massachusetts Findings for National
Funders and Partners**