



Worcester Cultural Coalition Annual Report: FY22

Advocacy

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA): In its ongoing work toward addressing systemic racism and reducing barriers to access, WCC board and staff participated in a multi-session DEIA workshop with Promoting Good. Through conversation, prompts, and reflection, areas of focus were identified for each WCC committee (listed at the end of this document), including responsibilities and definitions of success. The WCC board will continue this work over the next two years, and welcome participation from all WCC members and the public.

The WCC **Education Working Group** joined the Worcester Public Schools and Worcester Education Development Fund to implement 13 Culture LEAPS. Led by the Worcester Education Collaborative, the WCC joined the Education Round Table to discuss current educational priorities. This work manifested in:

- Continued development of the Woo-Labs model, a virtual enrichment academy concept to address out-of-school learning needs. Many members of this working group are also part of Woo-Labs, and in FY22 the decision was made to disband the WCC Education Working Group, allowing members to consolidate efforts and continue this work as Woo-Labs members.
- A summer enrichment academy, in which 12 cultural organizations collaborated with youth programs taking place via Recreation Worcester and partners such as the Boys and Girls Club to provide virtual camp curriculum and creative supplies. WCC provided guidance in the call to cultural organizations and outreach, and United Way provided funding support to the cultural organizations.
- Following the summer academy's success, the WCC assisted the WPS in providing virtual cultural programs during school hours in the first semester, in which 10 cultural organizations each received \$20,000 to deliver a series of 10 curriculum-based, interactive workshops. At the recommendation of the WCC, Crocodile River Music and Guardians of Traditions were added to the CultureLEAP roster for FY22.

Cultural Plan: The City of Worcester launched a Cultural Plan (Becoming Worcester) in 2019 in partnership with Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the Worcester Cultural Coalition. The Plan identified 90 strategies over 10 years and 20 strategic priorities actionable by 2020. In FY22, the Plan is going through a strategic restructuring, informed by the current state of our cultural climate. The Cultural Plan is a living document that will guide and inform decisions and approaches to the creative economy and cultural landscape of our city. In an effort to ensure an inclusive and transparent process, an advisory committee has been assembled to represent the cultural and creative community across a spectrum of public and private sectors. The Worcester Cultural Plan Advisory Committee is a cross-sector group of leaders committed to the wellbeing of the community and its creative and cultural sector. The Committee furthers the work as detailed in the Cultural Plan through review and advisory discussions. The committee advises key implementers of the Plan including the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, the Cultural Development Office, and the Worcester Cultural Coalition.

Legislative Advocacy:

- MASSCreative is an advocacy organization promoting support of the arts, sciences, and humanities. WCC staff and board serve on the MASSCreative Board of Directors, its Leadership Council, and as co-chair of the Policy Committee. These voices increase Worcester representation in statewide arts and cultural advocacy. Along with MASSCreative, the WCC continues to advocate locally and at the state level for COVID-19 relief funding and public art initiatives.
- In addition to regular partnership and conversations, Erin Williams was elected to the Board of Directors to better represent the interests and concerns of Worcester's cultural district, and PopUp Managing Director Hank von Hellion was named a Fellow with MASSCreative's Create the Vote campaign.
- Due to COVID-19 and the resulting hold on the state budget, WCC member organizations continued to advocate for federal, state, and local funding for the creative sector.

- The WCC joined MASSCreative, the MCC, and cultural institutions to successfully advocate for \$10 million in funding for the MA Cultural Facilities Fund, and advocated and engaged legislators to secure \$585 million in ARPA funds from the Commonwealth to the MCC for distribution.
- The WCC serves on the Americans for the Arts “Putting Creatives to Work Roundtable,” which advocates for national funding for the creative sector.

COVID Response

The **American Rescue Plan Act** provides \$350 billion in federal aid in response to public health and economic impacts of COVID-19. Funding for Worcester’s cultural community has been secured through two channels:

- The **Worcester Arts Council** received \$250,000 in ARPA funding from the **National Endowment for the Arts** (NEA) – 1 of 66 recipients nationwide. Sub-grants will be awarded to individual artists in August 2022.
- The City of Worcester has allocated \$4.5 million of its ARPA funds to Worcester’s creative economy. The City’s Cultural Development Office has worked with multiple departments in order to create comprehensive and accessible infrastructure for these programs. Dozens of Worcester residents were interviewed to form an Ad Hoc Review Committee, which will review and score applications to make funding decisions. Grant development processes are in progress for the upcoming grant programs:
 - Community and Cultural Festival Support: \$250,000. Grant applications will launch in fall 2022.
 - Creative and Cultural Organizations and Facilities: \$2,950,000. Grant program and application are being finalized in summer 2022, applications to launch in early fall 2022.
 - Cultural Plan Implementation: \$1,000,000. As the Cultural Plan is being reviewed and updated in 2022, launch of these applications for these funds will follow these updates.
 - Individual Artists: \$300,000 – these funds will supplement WAC’s existing NEA program.

Worcester Together: The City of Worcester partnered with the United Way, Greater Worcester Community Foundation (GWCF), and additional community partners to address acute and long-term needs of the Worcester community. Areas addressed include health, food, housing, education, youth opportunities, internet access, economic development, logistics, behavioral health, seniors, and culture. In response, the City’s Cultural Development Division, WCC, and GWCF established methods to identify the needs of the creative community and Worcester’s residents, and to embed arts, culture, and creativity in the support of the community’s greater needs. The WCC continued to hold the **Worcester Cultural Task Force**: periodic discussions for local arts and cultural workers. Topics ranged from funding opportunities, public health, poetry, youth cultural initiatives of the Worcester Police Department, and conversations with local Black, Indigenous, and female change-makers.

Promoting Arts and Culture

Media Buys & Trade: The WCC runs a multi-faceted advertising campaign on a variety of outlets including print, radio, local television, and online. These regularly-scheduled cash and trade efforts were on hold in response to COVID-19 and in alignment with the paid marketing strategies of many WCC members. In 2022, all were resumed, and for FY23 they were expanded to include Worcester-based Cumulus stations and two Spanish-language media: the newspaper Vocero and the local La Mega radio station.

Newsletters: The WCC’s biweekly e-newsletter the Arts & Culture Connection goes out to 18,000+ subscribers. Additional emails include the monthly JMAC newsletters, press releases, creative opportunities, Worcester Arts Council notices, special meetings, and CDD- and WCC-programmed events and opportunities. In FY22, the WCC sent over 900,000 emails, with an average open rate of 21.1% and an average click rate of 9.57%.

Radio & Television: WCC staff make numerous appearances on local media to share arts and cultural initiatives. In addition to guest segments on WCCA-TV with Mauro DePasquale and Community Conversations with Vicki Greene on WXLO, the WCC has 2 weekly radio appearances: Hank Stolz’s Talk of the Commonwealth at 8am Thursday morning, and Culture Beat, which airs Thursdays at 6:30pm on 90.5FM and online at WICN.org.

Social Media: WCC maintains social media channels, with over 12,000 followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Posts generated nearly 190,000 impressions with 324 posts promoting events and initiatives of WCC members, as well as advocacy efforts, funding opportunities, and news related to the local arts and cultural community. Women make up 2/3 of the audience, and 35-44 years of age showing the highest engagement.

Website: In FY22, WorcesterCulture.org had over 38,000 visitors and nearly 72,000 page views – 4.6x and 3.6x growth over FY21. After the Home Page, the next highest viewed pages were for the Calendar (16% of site traffic), About, and Create 508 pages. Page visitors skew slightly more female (57%), and the site is visited by all ages, with the largest group (23%) being 25-34. Over 30,000 visits were Direct Acquisition, meaning 78.4% of traffic was the result of users typing WorcesterCulture.org or clicking it in their own bookmarks. For comparison, FY21 saw 57.5% of its traffic (6,000 users) from Direct Acquisition. These data imply that recognition of WorcesterCulture.org as a resource for local arts and culture has grown substantially in the past year.

Jean McDonough Arts Center

The Jean McDonough Arts Center (JMAC) is home to the Worcester PopUp and BrickBox Theater, a hub for creative culture accessible to the community by design. Programs at the Worcester PopUp are run by Managing Director Hank von Hellion and Manager Doménica Dillon. BrickBox Theatre Managing Director Olivia Scanlon is assisted by Sarah MacIntyre, who was hired to a Manager position in 2022.

Though the pandemic delayed plans and complicated in-person engagements, both spaces in the JMAC have been active throughout FY22, with a measurable shift back to in-person programming. Pandemic safety protocol has been scaled back; as of summer 2022 the JMAC no longer requires proof of COVID vaccination or mask use for entry for all events, though these services can be facilitated by The Hanover Theatre upon request.

The Worcester Cultural Coalition received \$545,000 in funding from the Barr Foundation in FY22. These funds are being used in part at the JMAC, to create artist residencies, offer mentorship, and offset production costs for qualified presenters. Comprised of three one-month long residencies, ten one-day residencies, and subsidized use of the BrickBox Theater, JMAC staff have facilitated a robust programming schedule – on par with the pre-pandemic schedule.

Worcester PopUp: Since opening in 2018, the PopUp has hosted 600+ creative community events produced by WCC member organizations, artists, creative entrepreneurs, and staff. More than 10,000 people have attended public events at the PopUp, which is committed to supporting a diverse range of arts education and professional development opportunities through exhibitions, performances, mentorship programs, workshops, and networking events. The PopUp staff also collectively manage the Worcester Windows program, which installs visual arts in downtown storefronts and City Hall. These themed installations empower local artists to contribute to the evolving vibrancy and walkability of the Downtown area.

BrickBox Theater: Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the BrickBox Theater hosted many performances and events in FY22, including theatrical productions, karaoke, live-streamed and in-person meetings, musical performances, and more. Venue improvements were made to better accommodate clients and patrons, including sound proofing and remediation; comprehensive A/V, LX, and streaming infrastructure; acquisition of two pianos; and implementation of state-of-the-art streaming and recording equipment. The BrickBox also became home to The Hanover Theatre Repertory (THT Rep), an initiative committed to delivering dynamic theatrical events made in, and made for, Worcester. In its sophomore season, THT Rep has four shows lined up, with auditions being held for the coming season.

Marketing: The JMAC web presence combines voices and initiatives of JMAC staff, as well as events presented at both the BrickBox and PopUp. JMACWorcester.org had over 25,000 site visits, a 60% increase from last year. Its active social media accounts reach over 6,000 followers.

Mentorship: The JMAC has worked with interns and mentees, giving young people the opportunity to gain exposure to and experience in the business of the arts, event production, venue management, marketing, and customer service during their tenure with the JMAC.

City of Worcester Cultural Development Division

Cancellations: In compliance with COVID-19 guidelines, many annual events hosted on the Common were cancelled in FY22 including the REC Spring Garden Festival, City Field Day, and Latin American Festival.

Create 508: In collaboration with the Division of Youth Opportunities and with support from the JMAC, local artist Nicole Coleman directed 12 youth to pilot the Heart of the Arts (HOTA) youth creative entrepreneurship and event planning summer program. Now titled Create 508, the program is designed to create jobs and empower young creatives in their own pursuits via hands-on development and production of live cultural events, with adult creative mentors. HOTA coordinated Worcester's first Color the City festival on the Common and Franklin Street on August 20, with over 500 youth attendees. The Create 508 program expanded to include a new cohort of youth including a new program coordinator Claudia Bastante, 3 Artist Mentors, and several Youth Leaders.

Festival of Lights resumed in-person programming with choruses, tree lighting, and festivities. In partnership with the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District and Tower Hill Botanic Garden, the celebration extended beyond December 3 with illuminated sculptures displayed on the Worcester Common into February.

Filming in Worcester: Tax credits for the film industry became permanent in early FY22. During FY22, 8 commercial movies and 2 commercials were filmed in the city – a significant increase which demonstrates that the national film industry is interested in Worcester. The Economic Development staff work intimately with the film industry to facilitate filming in the city, from site searches to coordinating street closures. The film industry provides positive publicity for the City and triggers many economic benefits for local businesses.

Interns and Mentorship: The CDO staff hired and managed 4 interns in FY22, in addition to the mentorship of Create 508 youth. These efforts are investments in the next generation of creative leaders.

Poets Laureate: Juan Matos continued his third and final year as the City's Poet Laureate, and Adael Mejia, the second Worcester Youth Poet Laureate, was inaugurated in January 2022. The Poets Laureate serve as ambassadors of Worcester's historic, vibrant cultures of poetry and literature, using their positions to promote the city's great writers and the transformative qualities of poetry and the written word. The poets continued to host community and Worcester Public Schools programming, made 30+ live and virtual appearances, and collaborated with the Worcester Public Library for a celebration of National Poetry Month in April 2022.

Public Art: The City's dedication to enhancing public space through public art evolves as conversations with organizations such as Art in the Park, Creative Hub Worcester, and independent curators and producers continue. The Public Art Working Group, made up of City staff and representatives of the creative community, serve as advisors to public art initiatives. The City has continued pursuing opportunities for gateways into districts around the city. In early FY22, GWCF is working with the City and WCC to create a public art fund. CDD staff assisted with the design of promotional materials, kiosk desk, and content for each initiative.

- Main Street Reimagined is underway. This streetscape-focused program incorporates public art into the redesign of Main Street, with installation of 5 public artworks installed on Main Street.
- Wayfinding public art installations and storytelling trails create a sense of place and engagement. The second round of artists were selected, with installation completed for 7 district identifiers.
- The Worcester Black History Trail committee completed installation of 5 public historical markers.
- CDD worked with the Canal District Business Alliance to create a bronze sculpture honoring the creators of the Blackstone Canal: Boland and Wright.

Special Events: The Special Events Committee holds monthly meetings to assist event organizers, and continues to update its permitting process based on COVID-19 guidelines. As local gathering restrictions lifted, the CDO supported an unprecedented influx in Special Event Permit application request and inquiries. Over 80 Special Event and Parks Permit Application requests were reviewed and hundreds of organizers were directed to City resources to coordinate their public and private programming.

Summer Programming: The Out to Lunch Festival and Farmers' Market returned in 2021 for an abbreviated series. Over 60 artists, nonprofits, and food and farmer vendors participated in the events August 12 and 28. Crowds were thrilled by local performances the return of dancing, dining, and celebrating summer on the Common. The Movies on the Lot series offered over 200 attendees in vehicles the opportunity to enjoy safe, socially-distanced drive-in movie programming on July 22 and August 22 at the Francis McGrath parking lot.

Worcester Arts Council: In its FY22 grant cycle, the [Worcester Arts Council](#) (WAC) received 137 applications for project and fellowship grants, and awarded over \$206,000 to 50 projects and 7 fellows. The Greater Worcester Community Foundation (GWCF) generously donated \$10,000 toward fellowships.

- Thanks to robust marketing efforts, WAC's 2022 Funding Priorities Survey received over 3,000 responses from people sharing input on art and cultural initiatives most important to them. This detailed input, paired with the Council's drive to address equity issues, created the FY23 Funding Priorities:
 - **Project Categories** | Projects that focus on Public Art, Musical Performances, Arts Education & Instruction and programs for all age groups from children to seniors.
 - **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Access (DEIA)** | Projects that elevate the voices and experiences of historically marginalized groups to highlight the current and historical diversity of Worcester. Projects should create opportunities for artists and community members through a DEIA lens.
 - **Locations** | Projects that take place in or benefit areas of Worcester that are historically underserved.
- WAC also applied for and received \$250,000 in additional funding in ARPA funds from the NEA.

Worcester Tercentennial: In celebration of the City of Worcester's 300th birthday, the Culture Department Division (CDD) collaborated with the Worcester Tercentennial Committee to plan a public Parade, Road Race, Festival, Concert, Commemorative Book, Gift to the City and cobranded community programming. CDD coordinated the Festival event hosted June 11, 2022 on the Common and adjacent streets including 140+ vendors: artists, crafters, nonprofits, food trucks, and 20+ Worcester-based performance groups.

Worcester Cultural Coalition Operations

Funding: In FY22, the Worcester Cultural Coalition was funded in part by: the Barr Foundation, Bay State Savings Bank, the City of Worcester, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, the Hermann Foundation, the Jean McDonough Foundation, the Pell Family Foundation, the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (through The Hanover Theatre), WCC membership, and JMAC revenue.

Leadership: Eric Butler, Board Member and former President of WCLOC Theatre, has served as the WCC Chair since fall 2021. After 18 years as the Executive Director of the WCC and leading the City's Cultural Development Division, [Erin Williams stepped down in June 2022](#). Until a replacement is appointed, the City Manager's Chief of Staff Amy Peterson is serving as the Interim WCC Executive Director and Cultural Development Officer.

FY22 WCC Board Members *as of June 30, 2022*

Chair: Eric Butler, WCLOC	Monique Messier, Discover Central MA
Treasurer: Ellen Dunlap, Community Volunteer	Joy Murrieta, Main IDEA
Clerk: Zach Combs, Crocodile River Music	Amy Peterson, Interim Cultural Development Officer*
Peter Dunn, Worcester Chief Development Officer*	Jen Riley, Worcester Arts Council Chair*
Gloria Hall, Art in the Park	Troy Siebels, The Hanover Theatre
Jason Homer, Worcester Public Library	Matthias Waschek, Worcester Art Museum
Vanessa de Leon, Guardians of Traditions	* <i>Ex-Officio Board Member</i>
Tim Loew, Mass DiGI	

WCC Staff *as of June 30, 2022*

Doménica Dillon, Manager, PopUp	Amy Peterson, Interim Executive Director
Nikki Erskine, Marketing Manager	Olivia Scanlon, BrickBox Managing Director
Yaffa Fain, Programming Manager	Hank Von Hellion, PopUp Managing Director
Sarah MacIntyre, Manager, BrickBox Theater	

FY22 Working Groups Facilitators *as of June 30, 2022*

Advocacy: (vacant)	Executive: Tracy Kraus	Marketing: Nikki Erskine
Education: Joy Murrieta	Finance: Ellen S. Dunlap	Public Art: (vacant)
	Governance: Tracy Kraus	