CUYAHOGA
ARTS & CULTURE
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Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees
Wednesday, September 16, 2026

A meeting of the Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC) Board of Trustees was called to order at 4:03 pm at the Cleveland Public Library, Louis Stokes Wing, 2nd Floor Learning Center, 325 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

The roll call showed that Trustees Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, and Vernaci were present. It was determined that there was a quorum.

Also in attendance were: Jill Paulsen, Executive Director and CAC staff.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Action: To approve the minutes of the April 15, 2026 Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees as amended to correct the spelling of Dr. Shenise Johnson Thomas's name.
Motion by – Trustee Blakemore
Second by – Trustee DiCosimo

Vote: To approve the minutes of the April 15, 2026 Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees as amended to correct the spelling of Shenise Johnson Thomas's name.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

Action: To approve the minutes of the August 26, 2026 Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees.
Motion by – Trustee DiCosimo
Second by – Trustee Blakemore

Vote: To approve the minutes of the August 26, 2026, Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT ON MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment on today's agenda.

3. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Paulsen thanked everyone for joining her and the Board. Ms. Paulsen's remarks can be found in the board materials on page 8.

4. CONNECT WITH CULTURE

Mr. Jake Sinatra welcomed Jackie Feldman, Executive Director of Zygote Press. Jackie joined Zygote in 2021 and has brought deep experience in nonprofit management, which has guided the organization through an exciting time of growth and transformation. Zygote has received more than $460,000 in CAC funding since 2009, first as a Project Support grant recipient, and then since 2011 as a grantee in the General Operating Support program. Ms. Feldman provided the Board with an overview of the organization and its move to a new location that will expand its programs and partnerships.

5. FINANCE AND ADMISTRATIVE MATTERS

Finance Report

Ms. Meg Harris stated that the financials can be found on page 14 of the Board packet. Tax revenue through August was $12.4M and is slightly below budget. The per unit rate of comparison, the sale of cigarettes at the wholesale level, was 7.75% lower than it was for the same period in 2025.

She stated interest revenue was $405k and that non-grant expenditures through August were $689k. Non-grant expenditures are under budget due to timing of payments.

Ms. Harris said that interest revenue has remained strong as anticipated interest rates cuts have not happened, in fact, there was a quarter point increase today.

Ms. Harris said the Audit and Finance Advisory Committee met on June 8. The committee reviewed the Committee Charter and Internal Financial Controls Policy and Procedures. There were minor recommended changes to the Employee Travel and Expense Reimbursement Policy and a staff recommendation to eliminate the Panelist Travel Reimbursement and Compensation Policy since all panels are now held online. A summary of updates and both documents are included in the Board materials.

Administrative Matters: Policy Updates

Remote Work Policy

Ms. Harris stated that CAC's employment attorney, Elaine Brown of Squire Patton Boggs, had reviewed the Employee Manual. There is a recommended update to the Remote Work Policy to both simplify it and ensure it reflects CAC's current work practice. She asked for a motion to approve the update to the Remote Work Policy section of the Employee Manual, included in the Board packet.

Action: To approve the updated Remote Work Policy included within CAC's Employee Manual.
Motion by – Trustee Vernaci
Second by – Trustee Blakemore

Discussion: None

Vote: to approve the updated Remote Work Policy included within CAC's Employee Manual
Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.
The motion carried.

Employee Expense & Travel Reimbursement Policy

Ms. Harris said that the policy was last updated in 2009. This policy is being updated to reflect the current reality of the types of receipts which may be accessible. There are times when employees are unable to request receipts for certain expense-related items, such as paid parking. Additionally, sometimes a receipt may be a screen shot from a phone or an e-receipt vs. "original." Receipts will still be required when available, but when they are not provided by the vendor, expenses under $25 may be submitted for reimbursement.

Action: To approve the updates to the Employee Expense & Travel Reimbursement Policy.
Motion by – Trustee Johnson Thomas
Second by – Trustee DiCosimo

Discussion:
Are detailed receipts needed for meals?
Yes, line-item receipts are always required for meal reimbursement.

Vote: to approve the updates to the Employee Expense & Travel Reimbursement Policy.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

Panelist Reimbursement and Compensation Policy

Ms. Harris said that CAC no longer has its panelists travel; grant application reviews occur online. The honorarium compensation is included in the Guidelines which the Board approves routinely.

Action: To revoke the Panelist Reimbursement and Compensation Policy.
Motion by – Trustee DiCosimo
Second by – Trustee Johnson Thomas

Discussion:
Can panelists submit receipts if they have expenses associated with panel?
No, they receive an honorarium of $200 for their participation, which is standard protocol for serving on similar panels elsewhere. There should not be expenses associated with being a panelist for CAC.

Vote: to revoke the Panelist Reimbursement and Compensation Policy.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

Ethics Policy Update

Ms. Harris stated the Ohio Ethics Commission (OEC) has expanded the definition of "family member." To include domestic partners, stepchildren and stepparents. In accordance with the change, it is recommended that we also update the definition in CAC's policy.

Action: To approve the updated definitions of "family member" in CAC's Ethics Policy
Motion by – Trustee Johnson Thomas
Second by – Trustee Vernaci

Discussion: None

Vote: to approve the updated definitions of "family member" in CAC's Ethics Policy

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

2027 Board Meeting Schedule

Ms. Isenhart stated that the Board had received a proposed meeting schedule for 2027.

Action: To approve the 2027 Board Meeting Schedule pending an adjustment to the February date.
Motion by – Trustee DiCosimo
Second by – Trustee Blakemore

Discussion: None

Vote to approve the 2027 Board Meeting Schedule pending an adjustment to the February date.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Johnson Thomas, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

6. GRANTMAKING ITEMS

Preview of 2027 Grantmaking

Ms. Isenhart asked Mr. Jake Sinatra and Ms. Maya Curtis to provide the Board with a 2027 grantmaking update.

Mr. Sinatra stated that a summary was included on pages 9-10 of the Board materials. Overall, it is anticipated that 2027 grantmaking recommendations will be on par with this year's. General Operating Support is in the first year of a two-year grant commitment; we will recommend level grants to 150 organizations in that cohort for 2027. Project Support invites annual applications.

Ms. Curtis shared that the Project Support program had 173 eligible applications in this cycle. The eligible applications are now with CAC's 38 panelists who are conducting reviews online. Panelists are arts and cultural professionals that we recruit from across the country. The grant team provided a handbook and

hosted a training workshop to train and prepare panelists. Panelists are diverse in professional backgrounds, age, race, and geographical locations. Panel review will be completed by the end of September, and panel feedback will be made available on our website for applicants to review once scoring is finalized and grants are approved. CAC continues to merge and streamline its processes this year to improve user experience for applicants, panelists, and the team.

Discussion:

Have the changes to the guidelines impacted the number of applicants to the grant programs?
No, the number of new applicants is the roughly same and we expect a similar number of grantees in 2027 as 2026.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT ON CAC BUSINESS

No public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Trustee Blakemore, seconded by Trustee DiCosimo, to adjourn the meeting.

Vote: all Ayes. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 4:52 pm.

Attest:

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Leonard DiCosimo, Secretary, Board of Trustees