

Who Should Be The Mayor's Arts Czar? Our Nominees

experiences

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A crowd packs Boston City Hall Plaza for the Boston Calling Music Festival in May 2013. (Emma-Jean Weinstein/WBUR)

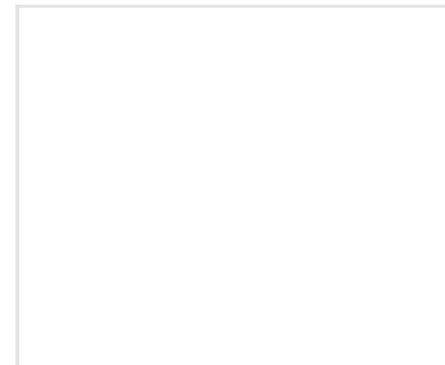
Martin Walsh was the first candidate in the Boston mayoral race to propose creating a new “cabinet level position in the arts” to give culture a priority in his administration. Now that he’s elected, who will be the city’s “arts czar”?

“I’m going to advise him that we do a national search for this job,” says Joyce Linehan, an arts promoter and member of Walsh’s transition team. “We may end up in Boston, but I think it’s important to turn over every rock. I would see it as a missed opportunity if we did not do that.”

ARTery’s Greg Cook and Ed Siegel have assembled their own lists of nominees from around the city.

Greg Cook’s list:

A commissioner for the arts in a new Boston Office of Cultural Affairs needs to be a promoter, an activist for art, an ambassador, someone who can bring in money, someone who can get big things done in the government bureaucracy—and help streamline it. The job requires caring about our arts organizations big and small, as well fostering artists living and working here. The commissioner must be devoted to connecting with a citywide audience that reflects the diversity of our community as well as someone who can build Boston’s reputation as a



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cool place to move.

A couple questions. Can the arts czar be an artist? Leaders of the city's biggest art museums and the head of the Fenway Alliance, which represents several museums, appear wary of putting an artist in charge. They want someone who knows how to work the city bureaucracy. Definitely a key qualification. But their implicit assumption that artists can't have those skills suggests more about how those institutions see artists than it truly reflects the range of work artists do here.

Should the arts czar be someone local? The Boston arts community continues to have a brain drain, in part because it frequently doesn't showcase and hire top talent already doing wicked good stuff here. So let's be open to bringing in someone amazing from Away. But hiring from among the accomplished people already in our community would be a notable first step toward supporting talent here.

So consider:

Joyce Linehan served as the Walsh campaign's policy director for all issues—not just culture. **Pluses:** They say: She knows everybody. As a former manager of the Lemonheads band and Boston rep for the music label Sub Pop, she's connected to the city's music scene from musicians at the grass roots to the top. She's skilled at publicity, a major part of the arts czar gig. Presently she's a promoter for First Night, the Boston Book Festival, ArtsEmerson and the Institute of Contemporary Art, which as her wired into some of the biggest events and institutions in the city. She's the person who instigated Rep. Walsh's campaign to make Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers' 1972 recording "Roadrunner" the state's official rock song—a proposal that's gone viral nationally. She founded the Dorchester Arts Collaborative and served on the board of the arts advocacy group MassCreative. And she's plugged into Massachusetts politics, including working on campaigns for Governor Deval Patrick and Congressman Mike Capuano. Many credit a gathering in Linehan's Dorchester living room for convincing Elizabeth Warren to (successfully) run for U.S. Senator in 2012. **Would she take the job?** Before the election, Linehan insisted, "I'm not going in [the administration] no matter what anybody says." But she's been named one of six co-chairs of Walsh's transition team.



Joyce Linehan (right) with Marty Walsh. (Mike Ritter)

Karin Goodfellow, director of the Boston Arts Commission,

which leads the city government's public arts programming.

Pluses: Since she became chief of the city arts agency in 2008, she's patiently laid the groundwork—including reshaping the composition of the commission's board—to begin to make the commission more accessible to artists and make its public programming more cool. These changes are beginning to become apparent in recent projects like New York artist Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's anti-harassment broadsides and San Francisco artist George Zisiadis interactive sound sculptures "Pulse of the City." And Goodfellow has managed to do this within a difficult city bureaucracy, with little money, and with lukewarm support from outgoing Mayor Tom Menino.



Karin Goodfellow (Courtesy)

Matt Wilson, executive director of MassCreative. **Pluses:** With three decades of experience in political organizing for Toxics Action Center, MoveOn.org and the like, he became the Massachusetts art advocacy group's first director in March and quickly built a coalition that helped make culture a central issue in Boston's mayoral campaign. MassCreative attracted an overflow crowd to a candidates forum about the arts at ArtsEmerson's 590-seat Paramount Mainstage theater on



Matt Wilson (Kat Waterman)

Sept. 9. The organization is also claiming credit for Governor Deval Patrick's announcement last week that the state will be tripling funding for maintaining arts facilities around the Commonwealth. **But** Wilson is not personally passionate about the arts. This hasn't hampered him so far, but would he be able to shape vision for the city's culture? And without Wilson, would MassCreative's momentum fall apart?

Jill Medvedow, director of the Institute of Contemporary Art.

Pluses: She led the fundraising, construction and city approvals to build the museum's waterfront structure that opened in 2006 and

has become an anchor to the city's burgeoning Seaport District. Previously she was deputy director of Boston's Gardner Museum, a program director at WGBH, and a deputy director of the New England Foundation for the Arts. She's also got a history producing prominent public art via her "Vita Brevis" program and recently with high profile ICA-curated murals in Dewey Square.



Jill Medvedow

Minuses: Her leadership at the ICA has been a critical and community success—but local artists have regularly been overlooked by the museum's programming. **Why would she take the job?** Her current post offers more power and independence than she'd likely have in the Walsh administration.

Kathy Bitetti, a Boston artist and arts activist who served as the Walsh campaign's lead culture advisor. **Pluses:** As executive director of the Artists Foundation in Boston from 1992 to 2009, the organization took a leading role in public policy affecting artists, from housing to taxes on independent contractors. And she gained a reputation as a bulldog. Most prominently, she was a leader in shaping the Massachusetts healthcare reform law to support artists when it was enacted in 2006. A co-founder of the Massachusetts Artists Leaders Coalition and former board member of the Massachusetts Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, she's also notably connected with people who make art here at all levels, which is evident in one of her current gigs as curator at the Boston community arts group Medicine Wheel.

F. Javier Torres, senior program officer for arts and culture at The Boston Foundation since 2011. **Pluses:** At the foundation, he already sits at the nexus of power, money and politics in Boston. In particular, he's seen as an advocate for showcasing the diversity of the city's culture and connecting arts with the neighborhoods, through the foundation's youth arts mentorship program and ExpressingBoston, which is funding "cultural flash mobs" to perform in Boston public spaces. Previously, he led the Villa Victoria Center for the Arts in Boston for six years.

Ted Cutler, philanthropist. **Pluses:** The Back Bay resident—and Dorchester native—was the visionary and the dollars behind the free, eight-day music, dance, theater and culinary arts festival at Boston Common, City Hall Plaza and Copley Square last July. Imagine the city permitting hurdles. It was obviously a success, showcased little known locals as well



as stars like Los Lobos and the Mighty Mighty Ted Cutler (Bill Brett) Bosstones, and was one of the biggest public arts fests the city has ever seen. Cutler made his fortune building casinos with Sheldon Adelson, according to the Boston Business Journal. Cutler's background also includes organizing conventions and booking music acts like Tony Bennett, Barbra Streisand and Sammy Davis Jr. These days, he's prominent in local philanthropy—the restoration of the 1,200-seat Cutler Majestic Theatre, construction of a new home of the Greater Boston Food Bank along Route 93, the annual holiday lighting of the Commonwealth Avenue Mall in the Back Bay, and the ongoing rebuilding of Emerson College's campus. **But** can Cutler play nice? Before Outside the Box debuted, its management was faulted. The initial artistic director and associate curator both left over creative differences that were aired in The Boston Globe. And the festival was unable to attract other major sponsors. **Why would he take the job?** Cutler is in his 80s and isn't out looking for work.

David Dower, director of artistic programs for ArtsEmerson since 2012. **Pluses:** He's nationally prominent in the theater world for his work here and previously in Washington, D.C., as well as for co-founding HowlRound, a think tank for the development of new nonprofit theater. During the mayoral campaign, he was one of the advisors who helped the Walsh team shape its arts platform, and was visible in his support of the arts and Walsh—particularly on social media. **But** can his nonprofit experience translate into the world of government?

Ed Siegel's List

I want the new arts czar to be someone who has so much stature in the city that he or she would be impossible for any of the various constituencies — politicians, developers, unions — to ignore. Even if he wanted to, Mayor Walsh would not be able to pay lip service to these candidates who can talk to the strongest people in the room while advocating for the most unrepresented in the community.

1. [Michael Maso](#), managing director of the Huntington Theatre Company. The Calderwood Pavilion, the extension of the Boston Center for the Arts, might not have happened had Maso not been negotiating with the mayor, the developer, the BCA and various other folks around town. He's been a stalwart champion of

smaller theaters in Boston and the Boston acting community. Paul Daigneault, the artistic director of SpeakEasy Stage Company, has praised him for all the help he gave to that troupe in its early days. Maso is probably not interested in leaving the Huntington, but his appointment would leave no doubt that the new mayor means business and that the arts czar is not a ceremonial appointment.



Michael Maso. (Evan Agostini/Invision/AP)

2. **Joyce Kulhawik**, critic and president of the Boston Theater Critics Assn. Since WBZ was foolish enough to let her go, she has not lost any presence in the arts community, as witnessed by her moderating the mayoral forums on the arts. When the Boston Herald and New England Cable News tried to bigfoot the first forum for their own debate she and MassCreative stared them down. Walsh was only half-joking when he said he was sticking to the arts forum because he didn't want to get a bad review from Joyce Kulhawik. Full disclosure: She's a friend and colleague (and occasional ARTery contributor), but having witnessed first-hand how she has whipped unruly theater critics into shape, politicians should be a piece of cake.



Marty Walsh and Joyce Kulhawik at the Walsh arts forum. (Kat Waterman)

3. **Will Lyman**, actor. Take a look at the accompanying photo or listen to his Voice of God narration of "Frontline." Would you say no to this guy? Having made his money in films, narration and commercials (the Dos Equis Most Interesting Man in the World ads, for one), Lyman returned to the Boston theater scene with a vengeance. He is not only one of the area's best actors, but chairman of the board for Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, which he helped keep afloat when things looked grim about five years ago. He knows the lot of struggling actors as he graciously works with smaller companies. He has been on the negotiating team for AFTRA's PBS contract and was a



Will Lyman in "Windowmen." (Boston Playwrights' Theatre)

national board member of Screen Actors Guild for six years.

4. [Catherine Peterson](#), executive director of ArtsBoston.

ArtsBoston (which provides its listings to the ARTery) has thrived under her 16-year leadership, providing important links between arts companies and consumers. BosTix, which sells half-price tickets to arts events throughout the area, is only part



Catherine Peterson

of the organization's success story. Having worked with her when I was filling in as arts editor at the Boston Globe I know how persuasive, and collegial, she can be in support of arts organizations though I'm always impressed by her ability to think outside the proverbial box.

5. David Dower, director of artistic programs for ArtsEmerson, was an advisor on Walsh's campaign and obviously has had Walsh's ear on arts matters. But Walsh should also consider Dower's ArtsEmerson boss, executive director [Rob Orchard](#).



Rob Orchard.

He knows all about the political scene, having fought the battle to revive the Paramount when he was at the American Repertory Theater. He seems like the proverbial kid in the candy store at ArtsEmerson, so he may not want to leave.

6. [Scott Edmiston](#), director of Office Of the Arts, Brandeis. Edmiston is known primarily as one of the best directors in town, but he also has a ton of administrative experience. He's a former director of StageSource, an umbrella organization for theater companies, and has brought cohesiveness to the Brandeis arts scene for the past 10 years. He



Scott Edmiston.

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- 1 'In The Mood' NOV 19, 7:30 PM | Cutler Majestic
- 2 Mazzy Star NOV 19, 8:00 PM | Paradise
- 3 The White Buffalo NOV 19, 8:30 PM | Brighton Music Hall
- 4 'Lizzie Borden' Opera NOV 20, 7:30 PM | Castle at Park Plaza
- 5 'The Genius of Berry Gordy' NOV 21, 8:00 PM | Jordan Hall

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