

**ANNUAL REPORT OF DEPARTMENT OF
ARTS, CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY**

“This past year has been a remarkable chapter in Franklin’s cultural story. Through bold public art, imaginative health and wellness partnerships, and programs rooted in community connection, the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy has shown that arts and culture are far from optional—they are the heartbeat of our town’s vitality, resilience, and identity.

None of this would be possible without the passion and energy of Franklin residents, artists, local businesses, and our dedicated cultural volunteers. Together, we are nurturing a cultural ecosystem that sparks creativity, strengthens our local economy, and brings our community closer - making Franklin not just a place to live, but a place to truly belong.” *Cory Shea, Director of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy*

Mission and Goals

The Department’s mission is to advance arts, culture, and the creative economy as integral forces in Franklin’s economic development, education, and community well-being.

FY25 priorities included:

- Expanding access to public art and creative placemaking.
- Fostering the creative economy through small business and artisan initiatives.
- Strengthening partnerships with community organizations and regional collaborators.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Public Art & Place Making: Thanks to a dedicated public art earmark from Senator Rebecca Rausch, the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy was able to bring new creative Public Art initiatives to Franklin. This funding made possible more than 15 public art projects, engaging over 100 community participants in the design and creation of works that celebrate Franklin’s identity, foster connection, and enliven shared spaces.

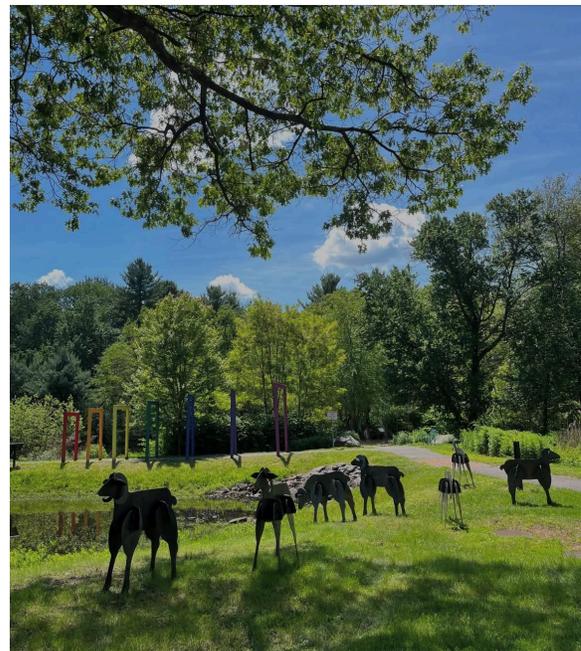
These initiatives not only enhance the look and feel of our town, but also strengthen community pride and demonstrate the power of public investment in the arts.

Dean/Franklin Station Mural – Following a competitive call for artists, Franklin artist Kayla

Nisbet was selected to design and complete a historic mural at the Dean/Franklin MBTA station. The mural will be completed in Fall 2025, serving as a gateway for commuters and visitors alike.

Franklin Sculpture Park - The park welcomed 7 new works/community installations in FY25

- Internationally known artist and Wheaton College Professor, Kelly Goff brought two new works (one more to be installed in FY26)
- Partnership with TriCounty Regional Technical School, “Community Herd”
- Franklin Fairy Trails and Franklin Tales: A non-juried community fairy house trail.
- Ceramic Lady bugs were painted at the Franklin Strawberry Stroll by over 50 youth aged artists
- Launched the first of three, MicroGalleries featuring the work of Franklin Art Teacher, Amy Vulf.
- Franklin area artist, Amy Adams welcomed another generation of the “Traveling School of Fish’ in June 2025.



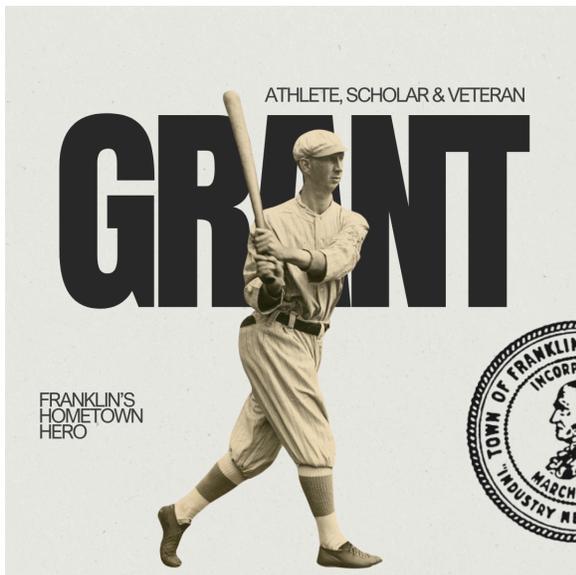
Other Public Art initiatives

Digital Eddie Grant Exhibition – Presented in collaboration with the Franklin Historical Museum and the Department of Veterans Services, this exhibition honored local history and creative

expression.

FranklinMA250 Pop Up Exhibition - “From Bonnets to Books,” A collaboration with the Franklin Historical Museum and the BLACK BOX; a historic exhibition (up from June 6th-8th) highlighting an example of Franklin’s straw hat making history.

Artsy Box Project – Provided support in coordinating the Franklin Cultural District Committee’s innovative initiative, connecting artists with downtown spaces to showcase their work (offered stipend)



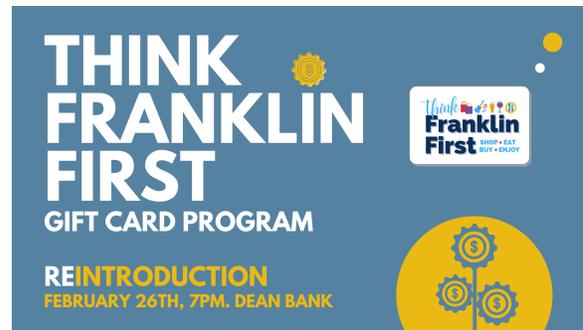
The Art of Play: Franklin’s Cornhole Project – Engaged the community through playful, interactive public art experiences (offered paid stipends)

The Art of Healing Project – Sought out poetry for a public art installation at the Franklin Sculpture Park to debut in September 2025 in honor of National Suicide awareness month. Supporting the creation of works focused on reflection, wellness, and community resilience (offered stipends).

Franklin Cultural District Guide – Developed a ‘Featured Artist’ section to highlight and promote the work of Franklin-based artists, increasing visibility and supporting the local creative economy.

Public Art Map Initiative – In partnership with Franklin Public Schools Highschool internship program and GIS Specialist Natalie Regan-Lampert, a high school intern began documenting Franklin’s public art, creating the foundation for the town’s first interactive public art map.

Creative Economy



To advance the department’s economic goals, the Think Franklin First gift card program was re-launched with a new marketing campaign. The card encourages residents and visitors to shop locally. Gift cards are redeemable at a wide range of small businesses in town, helping to keep consumer spending within the local economy and directly benefiting Franklin’s retail, dining, and service sectors. We’d like to thank our community partners in this initiative: Dean Bank, SwipeIT and The Random Smile Project.

In August 2024, the Think Franklin First gift card program generated \$3,911.42 in local spending. By comparison, August 2025 saw a notable increase to \$4,533.96—an approximate 16% growth. This upward trend indicates a strengthening of consumer engagement with the program and a growing preference for keeping dollars circulating within Franklin’s local economy.

The increase reflects not only a steady baseline of community support but also suggests that targeted marketing and seasonal promotions are effective in boosting sales. With the upcoming fall campaign and the added visibility of “A Wreath of Franklin,” we can reasonably predict another surge in card sales and redemptions.

The department also supports local festivals and cultural events, such as the Ladybug Stroll, Strawberry Stroll, Porchfest, Harvest Festival and A-Wreath-of-Franklin, through direct involvement and partnership with community organizations (Franklin Downtown Partnership and the Franklin Cultural Council + District Committee).

These events draw visitors from surrounding towns, stimulate business for downtown merchants, and highlight Franklin as a cultural destination. Strategic support of these efforts aligns with broader tourism and place-making goals, reinforcing the creative economy’s role in community vitality.

The Department was awarded a \$2,500 Festival grant from MCC which was used at the 2025 Strawberry Stroll and supported the launch of our first free community art-making activity: painting ceramic ladybugs (as part of a public art project). This initial project not only brought families together around a joyful, no-cost creative experience, but also helped us establish a foundation of reusable materials that can now be carried forward to future events. Building on this investment, the Department is coordinating another free drop-in art-making activity at the upcoming Harvest Festival, ensuring that all community members—regardless of disposable income—can participate in and feel part of our cultural celebrations.

By creating these inclusive opportunities, we allow families to save their spending for local vendors and food, which in turn strengthens small businesses, supports the vibrancy of our festivals, and contributes to local sales tax revenue.

Franklin Arts & Culture Symposium; launching September 2025 A two-day regional convening that brought together artists, cultural leaders, businesses, and municipal partners to explore the role of arts in economic and community development.; Creative Econ is in Session!

Grants & Funding

Through strategic grant writing and the Public Art Earmark secured by Senator Rebecca Rausch, the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy was able to leverage town funding to bring in nearly \$84,000 in additional resources—equating to roughly 83 cents in outside funding for every \$1 of local investment.

This kind of return on investment is notable; while many municipal cultural departments across the Commonwealth rely heavily on local appropriations or single grant streams, Franklin has developed a blended model that combines state-level advocacy, competitive grant awards, and municipal support.

By doing so, the Department has positioned itself on par with, and in some cases ahead of, peer communities—demonstrating that a small-to-mid-sized town can maximize cultural funding with the same sophistication typically seen in larger cities.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

With Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Cultural Council

and Emily Devlin LICSW, Head of Strategic Partnerships & Clinical Innovation Art Pharmacy

03/05/25 | 12-2pm
Presented at the Blackbox Theater
15 W Central Street, Franklin, MA
02038

Mass Cultural Council Art Pharmacy

TOWN OF FRANKLIN, MASSACHUSETTS

The flyer features two circular headshots of Michael J. Bobbitt and Emily Devlin. It also includes the logos for the Mass Cultural Council, Art Pharmacy, and the Town of Franklin, Massachusetts.

Community Initiatives

Art Pharmacy “The Town of Franklin is proud to be the first municipality in the United States to implement Arts Prescriptions—an innovative program that uses the arts as a pathway to healing and resilience. Funded through the Town’s opioid settlement allocation, Franklin Art Pharmacy is designed to address the ongoing impacts of the opioid crisis by weaving creative experiences into substance use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery efforts.

Through this nationally recognized model, community members can be “prescribed” arts experiences—from music, dance, and theater, to hands-on visual arts workshops—as tools to reduce stress, strengthen social connection, and support mental health.

By launching Art Pharmacy, Franklin is taking a pioneering step in demonstrating how the arts are not just cultural enrichment—they are public health interventions. The program reflects the Town’s deep commitment to community care, ensuring that all residents have access to both the economic and emotional benefits of a thriving creative ecosystem.

Franklin’s leadership shows how Massachusetts communities can reimagine the role of culture in healing and resilience.”

Marketing & Community Engagement

Community Partnerships:

Supported cross-sector partnerships bridging arts, health, education, and business.

Collaborated with Dean College School of the Arts, Franklin Public Library, Franklin Historical Museum, Franklin Cultural Council, Franklin Cultural District Committee, Franklin TV, Franklin Matters, Franklin Observer, The Metrowest Boston Office and Tourism, Dean Bank, Art Pharmacy, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Franklin Downtown Partnership, and dozens

of independent artists and local businesses throughout Franklin.

Digital Outreach:

Since March 2025, the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy has been creating and sharing the weekly Cultural District e-blast, (*delivered to your inbox Wednesdays at 7am*). Over the past year, the Arts+ Culture weekly E-blast was sent 42,755 times, with 27,822 opens and 1,912 clicks. This represents an open rate of approximately 65%, which is 26% higher than the industry average, and a click-to-open rate of about 6.9%, 5% above industry norms.

LET'S GET SOCIAL

Follower Growth

Current Follower Count
(as of August 2025):
1,200+ followers [Instagram](#)

Follower Count One Year Ago
(August 2024): Approximately
1,000 followers
(based on historical data and
growth trends)

Year-Over-Year Growth:
Approximately 20% increase in
followers



@franklinculture



Instagram/Facebook

When the Department came in control of the FranklinCulture instagram, it hadn't had a new post since 2022. By reactivating it in March 2024, we've grown the audience organically by 20%—a sign of renewed community engagement.

Marketing In Print

Cultural District Printed Guide:

Launched in Spring 2025 with support from a grant from the MetroWest Boston Visitor's Bureau, in partnership with the Franklin Cultural District, this seasonal printed guide offers a deeper look into the people and places that shape the Cultural District. The guide highlights district-based businesses, community events, and features local artists by showcasing their work and stories.

Campaigns: FranklinMA250

In 2025, Franklin is actively engaging with the statewide MA250 Campaign, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and supported by the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism. While the Town did not receive state tourism grant funding this year, we continued to advance our Historic Franklin campaign in

preparation for Franklin's own 250th anniversary in 2028.

As part of this effort, the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy created a full 2025 Historic Franklin Guide—highlighting the town's history, cultural programs, and community traditions. This guide not only deepens the community narrative but also provides context for visitors, connecting Franklin's story to the broader state celebration. Over 2,000 copies were distributed across Franklin, extending the reach of our cultural storytelling and heritage tourism efforts.

Looking forward to FY26

As we look ahead to 2026, we recognize that federal grant funding opportunities may be fewer. Even so, the Department of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy remains steadfast in its mission: **to create an economy using creativity**. By investing in local talent, supporting cultural programming, and fostering partnerships that strengthen both community life and small businesses, we will continue to demonstrate that the arts are not an accessory, but a driving force in Franklin's growth, resilience, and identity.

Respectfully submitted,

Cory Shea, Director of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy