



**Virginia Commission for the Arts
Commission Board Meeting
General Assembly Building
June 18, 2024**

Board Meeting Minutes

I. Attendees

- Commissioners: Dr. Dena Jennings, Jan Monroe, Barbara Parker, Frazier Millner Armstrong, Lou Flowers, Mike Markley, Roxana Jordan, Amanda Pillion, Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward
- Not in attendance: Robert Goudie, David Trinkle
- Staff: Margaret Hancock, Cathy Welborn, Lorraine Bruner, Dawn LeHuray, Nina Sjogren
- Attorney General's Office: Abigail Gump, Attorney

II. Call to Order

Chair Jennings called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and provided a welcome.

III. Approval of Minutes from March 2024 Commission Board Meeting

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve the minutes from the VCA's Board meeting in March 2024.

Motion: Commissioner Markley
Seconded: Commissioner Parker

Chair Jennings called for a vote to approve the March 2024 minutes to include updating "Diversity Committee" to its full name of "Diversity and Accessibility Committee"

All approved, motion passed. Commissioner Pillion abstained as she was not present at the March 13, 2024 Board Meeting.

IV. Executive Update

Executive Director Hancock provided an overview of agency operations and initiatives.

Organizational Chart

Director Hancock confirmed that the agency is now fully staffed and introduced the VCA's new Administrative and Communications Coordinator, Dawn LeHuray.

Year in Review | By the Numbers

- 14 new artists welcomed on to the Roster
- Increased Instagram engagement and growth
- 153 license plates on the road since May 26, 2024

Year of Firsts

- License Plate Toolkit | Shared communications from VCA grantees demonstrates continued growth and interest.
- Passport Program | Free and reduced tickets to arts programming for WIC card holders. Participant list has grown to 23 organizations.
- Growing State Partnerships | VA250 Impact Grant applications across all eight regions, with requests totaling over \$100,000.
- Strategic Planning Workbook | In-house resource designed for arts organizations. It has seen increased traffic since its launch and exemplifies investments beyond grant making.
- Mandatory Carryforward | Reduces the need for periodic votes for unused funds. Unused funds will automatically carry forward into the next fiscal year to be used for grants.
- Every Counties | VCA funding across 99% of all Virginia municipalities with the exception of Lunenburg and Prince George.

Virtual Charette Points of Discussion | Grants

- Level of need across the arts ecosystem is higher than the level of support available. This raises the question: Is attempting to serve everyone with a small amount of funding feasible in the long-term?
- Operating support is the most requested type of funding, and grantees rely heavily on VCA dollars.
- Diversifying our portfolio across various types of organizations (small, big, returning, etc.)
- Feedback has highlighted broader needs beyond grant-making. There were various requests around advertising training, partnership formation, networking, local government advocacy, artist support; confirming that there are many gaps that are expected to get filled without grants or grant-adjacent programming.
- Spark Mill Report identified four key takeaways: Connections and Connecting, Moving beyond Grant Making, Getting the Word Out and Sharing Stories, Capacity Building and Education for Organizations and Artists.

Chair Jennings opened the floor for discussion and posed three questions to the Commissioners regarding the Report:

Which of the four areas of Spark Mill's report do you think is the most important?

Commissioner Armstrong emphasized Moving Beyond Grant-Making through knowledge-sharing among arts organizations and acting as a connector. Commissioner Parker prioritized Connections and Connecting by sharing new opportunities beyond grants. Commissioner Markley emphasized Capacity Building with an aim to provide arts organizations the knowledge and tools for sustainable independence. Commissioners

Flowers and Thaxton-Ward emphasized expanding networks and strengthening relationships within the arts community. Chair Jennings underscored the significance of raising awareness and Sharing Stories. This approach aids the public in recognizing the agency's dedication to investing in the arts rather than programming, aligning with the agency's core mandate of investment.

Is anything missing from the four areas?

Commissioner Markley suggested an opportunity for arts organizations to leverage VCA funding by sharing award notifications with their localities and governments. This approach would enhance regional awareness of statewide investments in the arts. Director Hancock agreed and noted that the VCA offers a press release template to assist arts organizations in facilitating their own storytelling and outreach efforts.

What topic of topic(s) would you discuss in a 1:1 conversation with the Chair of the Executive Director regarding the VCA and the VCA's strategic plan?

Director Hancock stated that the Virtual Charette demonstrated a widespread reliance on the VCA for requests beyond its mandate, emphasizing the importance of connecting grantees with others in their locality. Hancock suggested exploring empowering strategies to link arts organizations with each other and available resources.

Commissioner Monroe joined the meeting at 10:34 a.m.

Commissioner Markley emphasized that these connections and resources are crucial for ensuring the foundational strength and sustainability of arts organizations. Commissioner Armstrong proposed utilizing Commissioners as a conduit between arts organizations and the VCA. Chair Jennings stated that sharing VCA workshops and the website would be an effective method for Commissioners to disseminate information about the VCA. Commissioner Parker shared the significance of wearing your VCA name tag at arts events as a visible and meaningful form of engagement.

Director Hancock outlined the next steps: Commissioners are encouraged to provide additional feedback from the Virtual Charette and Spark Mill Report by July 3, 2024. VCA staff will gather for a strategic retreat this summer, after which a draft of the strategic plan will be shared with Commissioners.

V. Chair Update

Chair Jennings welcomed Brett Bonda, President of Virginians for the Arts, acknowledging the organization's contributions to arts advocacy and support of the VCA's mission. She also expressed gratitude for the service of three Commissioners who will be completing their terms following the June Board Meeting: Commissioner Goudie, Commissioner Trinkle, and Commissioner Markley.

Commissioner Markley expressed gratitude to the Commissioners and the VCA for the honor, highlighting what a wonderful opportunity it has been to serve.

Chair Jennings reminded Commissioners about Box, the online platform for sharing Commission materials. She presented the Commissioner Orientation Handbook as a tool aimed at elevating the Commission's professionalism, highlighting the significant progress made in recent years.

Chair Jennings shared three considerations for FY26 Guidelines for Funding:

- OSS | Increase operating budget from \$10,000 to \$25,000
- OSS | Reiterate no debt funding with set deficit maximum
- Community Impact | Update Guidelines, application, and review process

VI. Advisory Panels

Director Hancock shared an overview of FY25 Advisory Panels. New enhancements resulting from the Advisory Panel Focus Group and now incorporated in the Panel process include:

- Reducing Advisory Panelists for Panels to five to seven each
- Providing a training webinar ahead of Advisory Panels
- Reiterating funding approach and evaluation criteria at the beginning of each Advisory Panel
- Assigning lead readers for each application to ensure ownership and enhance efficiency

Commissioners Markley and Armstrong, who participated in the Advisory Panel Focus Group, noted that these updates significantly enhanced the performance of the Panels. Director Hancock shared that following Advisory Panels, a new post-Panel survey for Panelists was introduced to assist VCA's ongoing process for improvements. Additionally, hand-signed thank-you letters were sent to all Advisory Panelists.

VII. Commission Votes | FY25 Grants

To streamline the process of grant awards, Chair Jennings announced that the Board would employ block voting. The procedure was as follows: Commissioners initially present a brief summary of the Advisory Panel they observed, followed by the identification of any recusals by the Board, subsequent discussions, and finally, the casting of votes.

PARTNERSHIP GRANTS

A. General Operating Support for Medium and Large Arts Organizations (GOS)

Chair Jennings provided the purpose statement for General Operating Support for Medium and Large (GOS) grants.

1. Short Form Applications

Director Hancock stated that there were 87 Short Form applicants. Organizations may opt for Short Form if they have received Priority 1 for three straight years or

opt to remain at Priority 2 status. Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve the (GOS) Short Forms for Medium and Large Organizations.

Motion: Commissioner Markley
Seconded: Commissioner Parker

Recusals:

Chair Jennings: The Front Porch, Arts Center in Orange, and Birthplace of Country Music

Chair Armstrong: CultureWorks

All approved, motion passed

2. Long Form Applications

Regions 6, 7, 8 | Advisory Panel #1

Commissioner Parker provided an overview of Regions 6, 7, 8 (Advisory Panel #1). Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Regions 6, 7, 8 (Advisory Panel #1) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commission Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Armstrong

Discussion: Commissioner Markley inquired about applications that raised concerns, specifically Lyric Council and The Prizery, and sought additional context. Commissioner Parker clarified that the Lyric Council presented strong documentation of artistic excellence and robust partnerships with community stakeholders. They were noted for their strong financial standing, and both Advisory Panelists and VCA staff recognized the organization's significant impact in their region. Regarding The Prizery, Commissioner Parker noted recent staff turnover, but also the organization's plan to address its financial shortfall. While Advisory Panelists were divided on whether to categorize them as a Priority 1 or 2 organization, they were recognized as a vital arts entity within their region, serving as the sole arts organization in that area.

All approved, motion passed

Regions 3 & 5 | Advisory Panel #2

Chair Jennings provided an overview of Regions 3 & 5 (Advisory Panel #2). She called for a motion to approve Regions 3 & 5 (Advisory Panel #2) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Pillion
Seconded: Commissioner Thaxton-Ward

Discussion: Commissioner Markley requested further clarification regarding American Shakespeare Center and expressed concerns about their financial

stability. He reminded Commissioners that this organization had previously attended Board meetings to address challenges and present new strategic plans. Commissioner Parker noted that artistic direction is unclear. Director Hancock noted that in addition to financial struggles, operational challenges due to leadership changes resulted in the recommendation of a lower Priority status.

Commissioner Markley stated the review for Endstation Theatre was indicative of a lower priority rating and asked to move it from Priority 1 to a Priority 2

Motion: Commissioner Markley

Seconded: Commissioner Armstrong

Chair Jennings called for a motion to move Endstation Theatre from a Priority 1 to a Priority 2.

All approved, motion passed

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Region 3 & 5 (Advisory Panel #2) as recommended by VCA staff with a Priority 2 rating for Endstation Theatre.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe

Seconded: Commissioner Pillion

All approved, motion passed

Region 4 | Advisory Panel #3

Commissioners Monroe and Jordan provided an overview of Region 4 (Advisory Panel #3). Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Region 4 (Advisory Panel #3) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Jordan

Seconded: Commissioner Monroe

Discussion: Director Hancock noted one change in the Board book concerning Public Art Reston. VCA staff confirmed that the organization's operating income from the previous year was below \$150,000, which excludes them from GOS funding.

Chair Jennings made a motion to remove Public Art Reston for the reason stated.

Motion: Commissioner Parker

Seconded: Armstrong

All approved, motion passed

Discussion: Commissioner Markley sought clarification on why Workhouse Arts Foundation was designated as a Priority 2. Commissioner Monroe pointed out deficits as a significant issue. Director Hancock shared deficiencies in their

strategic plan, noting interim leadership and prolonged key staff vacancies. She highlighted the need for clarity on how state funding would support their strategic goals.

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Region 4 (Advisory Panel #3) with the removal of Public Art Reston, as recommended by VCA staff.

All approved, motion passed

Regions 1 & 2 | Advisory Panel #4

Commissioner Armstrong provided an overview of Regions 1 & 2 (Advisory Panel #4) and added that there were three new applicants in Region 1. Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Regions 1 & 2 (Advisory Panel #4) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Thaxton-Ward

Seconded: Commissioner Flowers

Discussion: Commissioner Markley sought additional context for Virginia Repertory Theatre and Richmond Shakespeare. Director Hancock shared that Virginia Repertory is in a period of structural transition. They were the VCA's longest touring ensemble but opted to withdraw from the Touring Artist Roster. The lack of a current strategic plan did not demonstrate a strong Priority 1 organization. She stated that following a site visit to Richmond Shakespeare, VCA staff were impressed by their diverse casting, patronage, and effective use of the VCA logo.

All approved, motion passed

B. Operating Support for Small Arts Organizations (OSS)

Chair Jennings provided a purpose statement for Operating Support for Small Arts Organizations (OSS). Director Hancock highlighted significant growth in this grant program, with eligible applicants increasing from 76 in FY24 to 87 for FY25. This included both new and returning grantees, along with a more streamlined application. Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Operating Support for Small Arts Organizations (OSS) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Parker

Seconded: Commissioner Markley

All approved, motion passed

C. Creative Community Partnership Grants (CCPG)

Chair Jennings provided a purpose statement for CCPG Grants. Director Hancock presented high-level ROI statistics for CCPG Grants, noting applications across all eight regions with 240 sub-grantees and a ROI of 1,056%. Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve CCPG grants as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Thaxton-Ward
Seconded: Commissioner Markley

Recusals:

Chair Jennings: Town of Berryville, Town of Orange, and Town of Roundhill
Commissioner Pillion: Town of Abingdon

All approved, motion passed

IMPACT GRANTS

A. Community Impact Grants

Chair Jennings provided a purpose statement for Community Impact grants.

Commissioner Flowers provided an overview of Community Impact Grants (Advisory Panel #1) and inquired how less polished applications affect Priority ratings. Director Hancock noted that incomplete information could impact ratings but emphasized that the Commission staff strives to overlay insights when making recommendations.

Commissioner Pillion provided an overview of Community Impact Grants (Advisory Panel #2) and expressed concern about implicit bias while scoring rural organizations due to perceived lack of diversity efforts. Chair Jennings emphasized that diversity encompasses more than just race, stressing the importance of reinforcing this concept in future Advisory Panel training sessions.

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Community Impact Grants (Advisory Panel #1 & #2) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Parker

Recusals:

Commissioner Pillion: Round the Mountain SW VAS Artisan Network, Friends of Southwest Virginia, and University of Virginia/Virginia Film Festival
Chair Jennings - University of Virginia/Virginia Film Festival and George Mason University

Discussion: Commissioner Armstrong sought clarification on why the Hopewell Downtown Partnership did not receive funding. Director Hancock explained that while the mural and preservation aspects were valid, the lack of community engagement in the process did not align with the grant program's criteria and that the VCA does not support preservation or restoration. Commissioner Armstrong also inquired about The Belvedere Series not receiving funding. Staff stated Community Impact is a competitive grant program, and that the application for The Belvedere Series did not sufficiently demonstrate a priority for reaching diverse audiences. Commissioner Jordan inquired why the Virginia Film Festival was a Priority 3 recommendation for Advisory Panel but moved to a Priority 1 by staff. Director Hancock stated that the

project was focused on accessibility, and that the state's film festival is an important program worthy of state funding, but this did not translate to a few Advisory Panelists who significantly downgraded their Priority rating.

Chair Jennings made a motion to accept the Community Impact Grants (Advisory Panel #1 & #2) as recommended by VCA staff.

All approved, motion passed

B. Education Impact Grants

Chair Jennings provided a purpose statement for Education Impact Grants. Director Hancock shared that 17 of the 25 applicants were GOS grantees and six were school systems. As a result, an Advisory Panel was not conducted. Commissioner Markley reviewed the remaining two applicants that were neither schools or GOS grantees, Music Orchard and Montgomery Museum. Commissioner Markley then presented an overview of the arts programming proposed by the two Education Impact grantees: Music Orchard and Montgomery Museum of Arts of History.

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve Education Impact Grants as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong

Seconded: Commissioner Pillion

All approved, motion passed

VIII. Commission Votes | FY25 Budget / Grant Allocations

Chair Jennings shared the Commission would go into closed session due to recommendation by legal counsel. Commissioner Pillion, VCA Staff, and public attendees, left the Board meeting.

Chair Jennings made a motion to return to open session. Commissioner Pillion, VCA Staff, and public attendees, returned to the Board meeting.

Seconded: Commissioner Monroe

All approved, motion passed

Chair Jennings called to certify the vote, that pursuant to Code of Virginia 2.2-3711(A)(2), closed session occurred for the purposes of legal counsel. Commissioner Parker seconded.

Roll call vote:

Jennings, aye

Monroe, aye

Parker, aye

Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Jordan, aye
Markley, aye
Thaxton-Ward, aye

All approved, motion passed. Commissioner Pillion abstained as she was not present in the closed session.

Director Hancock shared NEA funding details for the 2025 fiscal year. In order to continue stewarding a strong relationship with the NEA, the VCA has facilitated several letters of appreciation to the NEA to be signed by the Governor and Commissioners. The only increase to state funding covers state-implemented increases in operational and support services. Notably, the grants administration budget was incorporated into the allocation budget for the first time this year. Considerations and decisions associated with maintaining level funding include:

Increase of eligible income of GOS grantees, new GOS grantees with larger budgets, new applicants moving from OSS to GOS, anticipated growth for OSS in year two grant program, and Education Impact applicants already receiving GOS funding.

Virginia Repertory and American Shakespeare Center's withdrawal from the Touring Roster will result in an infusion of \$34,000 back into the budget. Consideration of a multilayered approach to preserve operating support includes allocating Community Impact Grants to Priority 1 and 2 rated applicants only, capping Education Impact Grants at \$3,500, and eliminating Special Recognition and Artist Fellowships.

Artist Fellowship Vote

Director Hancock discussed the Artist Fellowship program, noting a history of pausing when funding requests exceed appropriations, consistently low application rate, national concerns with AI generated submissions, and accessibility concerns in regard to artistic merit. The VCA currently supports artists directly through the Artist Rosters. She added that the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), a sister agency, operates a successful state-run Fellowship program.

Chair Jennings called for a motion to pause the Artist Fellowship program for the foreseeable future.

Motion: Commissioner Parker
Seconded: Commissioner Pillion

All approved, motion passed

FY25 Proposed /Mandated Allocations Vote

Director Hancock explained that VA250 funding operates under a separate MOU, and therefore, no specific line item is allocated for this funding in the budget.

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve FY25 Proposed/Mandated Allocations.

Motion: Commissioner Thaxton Ward
Seconded: Commissioner Markley

All approved, motion passed

Commissioner Pillion abstained as she was not present in the closed session.

IX. Commission Votes | FY25 Guidelines Update

Director Hancock presented a proposed FY25 Guidelines Update. Under this update, General Operating Support (GOS) recipients would receive their full award upfront to minimize administrative fees and streamline VCA staff time, aligning with national standards moving towards consolidated GOS payments.

Chair Jennings called for a motion to update General Operating Support payments to one payment.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Parker

All approved, motion passed

X. Commission Votes | FY25 Slate of Officers

Chair Jennings introduced the new proposed slate of officers for FY25:

Commissioner Parker as Chair
Commissioner Armstrong as Vice Chair
Commissioner Flowers as Secretary

Motion: Commissioner Markley
Seconded: Commissioner Thaxton-Ward

Chair Jennings called for a motion to approve the new FY25 slate of officers.

All approved, motion passed

XI. Public Comment | Meeting Adjournment

Brett Bonda, President of Virginians for the Arts (VFTA) since January 2024, expressed gratitude to Director Hancock and the VCA staff, underscoring the value of their relationship. Virginians for the Arts is currently engaged in a new strategic planning process aimed at guiding future initiatives. Their next quarterly meeting will take place at Wolf Trap, where they will provide further updates. Bonda also shared VFTA's ongoing

collaboration with McGuire Woods and plans to enhance arts initiatives in communities, in addition to Arts Advocacy Day.

Chair Jennings announced that the upcoming Board meeting would take place September 24 – 25, 2024, in Williamsburg.

Director Hancock expressed gratitude for Chair Jennings' dedicated service as VCA Board Chair, acknowledging her outstanding contributions in advancing the agency's mission and goals. Commissioner Jennings turned the gavel over to new Chair Parker.

Incoming Chair Parker called for a motion to adjourn the June 18, 2024, Board meeting.
Seconded: Commissioner Jennings

All approved; motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:34 p.m.