



**Virginia Commission for the Arts
Commission Board Meeting
Virtual
December 4, 2024**

Board Meeting Minutes

I. Attendees

- Commissioners: Barbara Parker, Frazier Millner Armstrong, Lou Flowers, Jan Monroe, Amanda Pillion, Alex Grabiec, Yan Zhao
- Not in attendance: Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward
- Staff: Colleen Dugan Messick, Casey Polczynski, Shauna Friend, Cathy Welborn, Lorraine Bruner, Dawn LeHuray,
- Attorney General's Office: Abigail Gump, Attorney
- Public: Emily Anne Gullickson, M.Ed. J.D., Deputy Secretary of Education

II. Call to Order

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. and provided a welcome. She introduced the VCA's newly appointed Executive Director, Colleen Dugan Messick, who then offered her introductory remarks. Colleen expressed her gratitude to the VCA staff, as well as Abigail Gump, and shared her excitement about furthering VCA's mission and enhancing its recognition.

III. Approval of Minutes from September 2024 Commission Board Meeting

Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the minutes from the VCA's Board Meeting in September 2024.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe

Seconded: Commissioner Flowers

Flowers, aye

Grabiec, aye

Monroe, aye

Parker, aye

Pillion, aye

Zhao, aye

All approved, motion passed

Commissioner Armstrong abstained as she was not present at the September Board Meeting.

IV. Chair Update

Chair Parker emphasized the importance of Commissioners attending quarterly Board meetings, noting that with a smaller Board, a minimum of five members must be present to reach a quorum. Senior Grants Officer, Cathy Welborn, shared that GOS grantee, The Prizery in South Boston, will be closing their doors in the near future. They have completed all required grant activities and will be transferring their programming to the Southern Virginia Community College. She was glad to hear that the activities would be transferred rather than discontinued, as there are few arts programs in this region of the state.

V. Executive Update

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

Special Initiatives

- On the Square | Featured two VCA grantees alongside a local artist to design this year's event print materials. The event successfully engaged Commonwealth employees from over 25 state agencies.
- Arts in Corrections webinars | Third iteration of the Mid Atlantic Teaching Artist retreat, a cohort of state agencies who provide professional development for teaching artists in the Mid-Atlantic region. This session was co-hosted with the Maryland State Arts Council and highlighted the impact of arts in correctional facilities.
- Virginians for the Arts Webinar | Shared this webinar, which was facilitated by VFTA and McGuire Woods Consulting. This webinar provided valuable insights on fostering meaningful relationships with lawmakers and advocating for pro-arts policies. Arts Advocacy Day will be held on January 23, 2025, and the VCA is considering setting up a table to showcase its mission at the event.
- Hurricane Helene Resource | Shared resources for artists and arts organizations impacted by hurricane Helene, shared in our newsletter and General Resources page.
- Poet Laureate | Governor Youngkin recently announced Mattie Quesenberry Smith as the new Virginia Poet Laureate. The VCA looks forward to connecting with her and exploring potential collaboration opportunities on Poetry Out Loud.

Grants overview

Executive Director Messick shared key takeaways on VCA grants since the September Board Meeting. The FY25 grant cycle begins on a strong note, with only seven counties yet to receive VCA funding: Cumberland, Dinwiddie, King George, Lunenburg, Nottoway, and Surry. She announced that the new FY26 Guidelines for Funding and applications are now available on the VCA website. An upcoming webinar, 'Which Grant is Right for You?', will be held on December 10 to provide information about the FY26 updates and offer tips for both new and returning applicants. VCA staff is preparing for upcoming Spring Advisory Panels which will consist of 5-7 Panelists from various regions. She encouraged Commissioners to begin nominating new panelists for the FY26 Advisory Panels and emphasized the importance of ensuring diversity in nominations, including expertise, age, gender, and regional representation.

Artist Engagement

Executive Director Messick shared that the VCA has successfully onboarded all Touring and Teaching Artists approved at the September 2024 Board Meeting. Announcements for new FY26 Touring Artists will be made today, and Teaching Artists will be announced in January via the VCA's communication channels.

She provided an update on the VCA's two rolling grant programs that utilize the Artist Rosters: Virginia Touring Grants and Arts in Practice Grants. The FY25 Virginia Touring Grants application deadline passed on December 1, and the program saw lower application numbers, partly due to the Virginia Touring Repertory Theatre withdrawing from the FY25 season. Unused Virginia Touring Grant funds may be redirected to support additional Arts in Practice grants and could be carried over into FY26. VCA staff acknowledged the decrease in applications and will gather feedback from Presenters and other state arts agencies with Artist Directories. They will also reach out to theatre companies with strong school programming across the state for possible recruitment. The Arts in Practice application cycle is halfway complete, with steady submissions. Both rolling grant programs are engaging broad audiences, although regional representation for Arts in Practice Grants has posed challenges. Efforts will be made in FY26 to conduct targeted outreach to Teaching Artists in these areas.

Operations

Executive Director Messick reported that the VCA has improved its overall IT grade from a D to an A, thanks to Deputy Director Casey Polczynski's leadership in spearheading the agency's IT compliance efforts. Fiscal updates include the submission of the NEA application in October, which is currently under review for FY26 funding, with notification expected in the spring. The VCA's FFR has been submitted, and the FDR will be submitted mid-December, to ensure that all NEA reporting requirements are met.

She highlighted that the Virginia Arts Fund, created in 1977, is a non-reverting fund supported by arts license plates. From 1977 to 2000, the code was interpreted in a way that only allowed access to the fund's interest, not the principal. The fund currently totals over \$1.5 million, but a 2015 audit raised concerns that the fund could be at risk of being redirected by the state. She proposed addressing this fund in two ways: first, to pull \$66,000 in FY25 based on a three-year average of accrued interest; and second, to work with staff to develop a policy on how these funds should be used moving forward, which will be presented to the Board in March. Matching changes or adjustments may be required.

Region 5 Commissioner Vacancy

Executive Director Messick stated that the Governor is still seeking to appoint a new Commissioner for Region 5. The Secretary of the Commonwealth is requesting nominations from the Lynchburg area, and Commissioners are encouraged to submit any recommendations.

Communications

Executive Director Messick shared the agency's Instagram account continues to grow and that Administrative and Communications Coordinator, Dawn LeHuray looks forward to reactivating the agency's Facebook and LinkedIn accounts to further increase reach. Additionally, the VCA website will be expanding to include new resources and content, with staff planning a brainstorming session to generate new ideas. She proposed

expanding Commissioner roles by featuring their photos and bios on the VCA website, which could help connect Commissioners with their regions. This could also include hosting regional "meet and greet" events as announcements, potentially increasing engagement and awareness of arts communities.

Commissioner Armstrong and Flowers expressed enthusiasm for the ambassador role and voiced their support. Chair Parker emphasized that Commissioners should have their own VCA email addresses for privacy and website listing purposes, separate from personal or work emails. Commissioner Zhao inquired about opportunities to become more involved in arts events in his region. In response, Chair Parker and VCA staff proposed creating a communications toolkit to be shared at the March Board meeting for Commissioners to use in their outreach efforts.

VI. Closed Session

Chair Parker made a motion to convene the Commissioners of the Virginia Commission for the Arts into closed meeting pursuant to the Code of Virginia Section 2.2-3711 (A)(7) and (A)(8) for consultation with legal counsel.

Motion: Commissioner Parker
Seconded: Commissioner Flowers

Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Grabiec, aye
Monroe, aye
Parker, aye
Pillion, aye
Zhao, aye

All approved, motion passed

The Commission Board Meeting entered open session, and public and staff members rejoined.

Chair Parker made a certification motion:

Whereas the Commissioners of the Virginia Commission for the Arts convened in closed meeting on this December 4, 2024, pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

Now be it resolved, in accordance with Virginia Code § 2.2-3712, the Board certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge:

- i. Only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under this chapter; and*
- ii. Only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered during the closed meeting.*

- iii. *Any member of the public body who believes that there was a departure from these requirements shall so state prior to the vote, indicating the substance of the departure that, in their judgment, has taken place. The statement shall be recorded in the minutes of the public body. If any members oppose this motion, please state the reason during the roll call vote.*

Motion: Commissioner Parker

Seconded: Commissioner Monroe

Armstrong, aye

Flowers, aye

Grabiec, aye

Monroe, aye

Parker, aye

Pillion, aye

Zhao, aye

All approved; motion passed

VII. Diversity and Accessibility Committee Update

Diversity and Accessibility Committee Chair, Commissioner Monroe, and Deputy Director Casey Polczynski shared Diversity and Accessibility updates.

- **Passport Program Updates** | Deputy Director Polczynski shared that a second webinar hosted since the program's inception, and the VCA also presented the program at the second WIC Coordinators Conference. New materials, including flyers and an opportunity list, are now available in Spanish on the website. Currently, 30 organizations are participating, and a question about program participation will be included in the FY26 GOS and OSS applications. Commissioner Monroe suggested expanding the Passport Program to explore partnerships with other agencies, including Uber Arts, to address transportation barriers. Talks with DHRM about program expansion are ongoing, with more updates at the March Board Meeting.
- **General Accessibility Updates** | The Accessibility Task Force met in 2023 to brainstorm resources for VCA grantees, resulting in a designated page on our website, which went live in October. Key takeaways from the NASAA Assembly Conference 2024 include SAAs offering technical assistance for grantees to attend accessibility conferences and dedicating funds for registration costs for the LEAD Conference. The VCA is revising its Editorial Style Guide to incorporate Spanish translation into our documents. NASAA highlighted the Passport Program in their Cross-Sector Strategies for Community Infrastructure and Community Cohesion document forthcoming in 2025.

VIII. 2025 – 2028 Strategic Plan

Chair Parker introduced the draft of the Strategic Plan, emphasizing its role as the agency's roadmap for the next four years. Executive Director Messick expressed gratitude to former Virginia Fellow Katie Brown and Artist Engagement Coordinator Lo Bruner for leading the design process. She invited feedback on the following sections of the plan:

Vision, Role, and Guiding Principles

No further edits.

Our Arts Ecosystem

Commissioner Grabiec appreciated the inclusion of numbers and data. In the first paragraph, he recommended removing both "not only" and "but." Regarding the Economic Impact data point, he suggested clarifying what the \$19.3 billion refers to specifically. If available, it would also be helpful to include a comparison between the amount distributed by the VCA and the dollars generated.

Priority #1 | Empower Virginia's Arts Organizations to Thrive in Community

Commissioner Armstrong questioned the use of "In Community" in the Priority Header and suggested considering a change from the singular "Community" to "Communities." Commissioner Grabiec recommended that in Tactic 1.1, "Board" should be lowercase, rather than capitalized.

Priority #2 | Expand Access to the Arts for all Virginians

Commissioner Grabiec noted that the terms "state" and "Commonwealth" are used inconsistently and recommended establishing consistency throughout the document. Commissioner Armstrong suggested using "varying sizes" instead of "varying scales" in Tactic 2.1.

Priority #3 | Elevate the VCA Rosters to Support Virginia's Artists and Grow the Economy

Commissioner Monroe suggested adding language to Tactics 3.1 or 3.2 that emphasizes accessibility. Commissioner Armstrong expressed concerns of the Priority name and about the challenge of measuring economic growth in this context. In response, Chair Parker recommended changing "Grow the Economy" to "Grow the Creative Economy." And Commissioner Grabiec proposed changing "and" to "to."

Priority #4 | Increase the Impact of the Agency and its Mission through Partnerships

Commissioner Grabiec suggested connecting the two sentences in Tactic 4.3, replacing the separation with "or meaningfully." Commissioner Parker recommended using "strengthen" instead of "establish" in Tactic 4.2 to better convey the intent of improving existing communication channels.

General Discussion

Executive Messick shared her appreciation of staff and Commissioner feedback and looks forward to using this document to advance our mission, enhance our visibility, foster internal growth, and strengthen support for the arts across the Commonwealth.

Commissioner Flowers appreciated this document's brevity and expressed her support.

Chair Parker acknowledged the staff's efforts and the quick turnaround time.

Commissioner Armstrong noted the remarkable growth from where we started to where we are now. She suggested that on the Commitment page, where the Outcomes are listed, we spell out the Priorities to better connect them with the outcomes. Commissioner Grabiec recommended expanding "art forms" to "art form" in Outcomes under Priority 2. He suggested including a phone number and address on the "Contact Us" page. In response, Executive Director Messick proposed adding a note: "We encourage other means of communication, as not all constituents have email or internet access." Lastly,

Commissioner Zhao requested the removal of his nickname "Tim".
Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan, as reviewed today, including the suggested edits outlined during discussion.

Motion: Commissioner Pillion
Seconded: Commissioner Monroe

Roll call vote
Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Grabiec, aye
Monroe, aye
Parker, aye
Pillion, aye
Zhao, aye
All approved, motion passed

IX. Public Comment | Meeting Adjournment

Chair Parker welcomed public comments and announced that the next Board Meeting would be held on March 12-13, 2025, in Staunton, followed by the June Board Meeting on June 11, 2025, in Richmond. She shared that new Commissioner Orientation would take place after this December Board Meeting.

Chair Parker called for a motion to adjourn the December 4, 2024 Board Meeting.

Motion: Commissioner Flowers
Seconded: Commissioner Armstrong

All approved, motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 11:38 a.m.