



**Virginia Commission for the Arts
Commission Board Meeting
General Assembly Building
June 11, 2025**

Board Meeting Minutes

I. Attendees

Commissioners: Barbara Parker, Frazier Millner Armstrong, Lou Flowers, Debbie Garrett, Alex Grabiec, Jan Monroe, Tim Zhao

Virtual attendance: Amanda Pillion, joined at 9:52 a.m.

Not in attendance: Dr. Vanessa Thaxton-Ward

Staff: Colleen Dugan Messick, Casey Polczynski, Shauna Friend, Cathy Welborn, Lo Bruner, Dawn LeHuray

Attorney General's Office: Abigail Gump, Attorney

Office of the Secretary of Education: Hannah Hughson, Communications Advisor

II. Call to Order

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and provided a welcome.

Chair Parker conducted a Roll Call of Commissioners:

Parker, here

Armstrong, here

Flowers, here

Garrett, here

Grabiec, here

Monroe, here

Thaxton-Ward, absent

Zhao, here

Pillion, absent

III. Approval of Minutes – March 2025 Commission Board Meeting

Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the March 2025 Board Meeting minutes:

Motion: Commissioner Monroe

Second: Commissioner Garrett

All approved; motion passed.

IV. Chair Update

Chair Parker thanked Commissioners Monroe and Pillion for their years of service, noting that this was their final VCA Board meeting. Chair Parker announced the new committee leadership, naming Commissioner Grabiec as Chair of the Diversity & Accessibility Committee and Commissioner Flowers as Chair of the Budget & Policy Committee.

Chair Parker shared the latest MidAtlantic Arts report for Virginia, which highlighted a 21% ROI, and expressed optimism for this continued partnership.

Chair Parker shared the latest data and insights from the 2025 Constituent Feedback Survey. The survey results provided valuable feedback, with performing arts organizations and arts education organizations emerging as the top two participant groups. It was distributed via social media, direct emails to grantees and Roster Artists, and shared with Local Arts Agencies, the VMFA, and the Virginia Tourism Corporation, all of whom helped amplify the survey by resharing with their networks.

Chair Parker provided an update on the FY26 budget noting level state funding, as well as a one-time \$2 million appropriation. She also noted \$150,000 in pass through funds to be designated to Elegba Folklore Society via the City of Richmond. Chair Parker shared that the agency is still awaiting an update on NEA funding, which is expected to be announced in July. Award letters to GOS grantees will be on hold; however, they will receive an email notifying them of their payment status in the interim, as their payments typically include federal funds. Executive Director Messick shared that the NEA is considering creating a grant fund for America250 and State Arts Agencies have been invited to support and help fund this program.

Chair Parker provided an overview of the Special Fund Task Force, which is tasked with determining how to allocate funds from the \$2 million appropriation, carryforward funds, and the tax check-off/Arts License plate fund. She announced that Commissioner Garret will serve as Chair, with Commissioners Armstrong, Flowers, and herself also serving on this committee. Commission Garrett will present findings from two in-person meetings to be scheduled for August, with final decisions to be voted on at the September Board Meeting.

V. Executive Director Update

Executive Director Messick provided an overview of agency updates and upcoming Work Plans.

Mission Moment

- Host of Sparrows, an aerial and circus ensemble on the Touring Artist Roster, received excellent feedback for their performance at UVA Wise as part of a Virginia Touring Grant.
- GOS grantee, American Shakespeare Center thanked the Commissioners for their recent Board visit to Staunton and attending their performance of *Little Women*.

FY26 Summer Work Plan

- Staff will hold a retreat to review the results of the 2025 Constituent Feedback Survey and draft policy on how the agency's various state funding sources will be allocated moving forward. These recommendations will be put forth to the Special Fund Task Force.
- Expand relationships with Virginians for the Arts and the Virginia Tourism Corporation.
- Work with legal counsel to update VCA Code. If approved at the September Board Meeting, the Code would then be submitted to the General Assembly at its next session.

FY26 Fall Work Plan

- Roundtable discussions on Guidelines and applications will be held in late September and October. Staff will collaborate closely with two Commissioners, a CPA/auditor, and community members to develop recommendations and streamline the application process.
- Focus areas: GOS/OSS, VA Touring & Arts in Practice, Community Impact, CPPG, and Advisory Panels
- Final recommendations will be presented for a vote at the December Board Meeting.

Staff Updates

- Lo Bruner represented the VCA at the Virginia Governor's Conference on Aging. By sponsoring this event, the agency increases its visibility among organizations serving Virginia's aging population. Attendees and sponsors included fellow state agencies, former

Roster Artists, and current VCA grantees.

- Shauna Friend is overseeing an Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) audit of the FY23 records. The last audit was conducted in 2019. As the VCA is in a strong position and does not anticipate issues aside from addressing the Arts fund. A summary of findings will be released in October. Additionally, the final amount of carryover balances should be shared by the end of August.
- Casey Polczynski shared that staff will welcome a new Virginia Management fellow, who is a recent UVA graduate. Additionally, she has worked with VITA to finalize the terms and conditions for the VCA's Grant Lifecycle Management System. She was accepted into the Commonwealth Leadership Academy, a six-week program of the VCU Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute in Public Affairs. Her cohort's project, *Connecting Veterans to their Future*, focused on linking veterans to resources and services through the VA Veterans Network.
- Dawn LeHuray continues to grow the VCA's social media channels and newsletter audience, with all platforms showing increased subscribers and open rates. She recently featured a video reel with VCA Touring Artist John Bullard. Website updates are complete, which include staff highlights and a newsletter sign-up pop-up.

VI. Diversity and Accessibility Committee Update

Casey Polczynski shared that VITA is launching a new web translation application called Smartlink, which will be available this summer. Since the VCA website is already in compliance with COV web standards, it is well-positioned to utilize Smartlink to translate the site into 11 languages. She shared that the NEA's Office of Accessibility has been disbanded. Mid Atlantic Arts has launched an Accessibility Self-Assessment Study Group. VCA will join this Study Group to evaluate its accessibility efforts and identify the best ways to support grantees and arts organizations in enhancing accessibility. She shared that the VCA recently met with VDH marketing coordinators to explore new ways to promote the Passport Program to WIC card holders.

As Chair of the Diversity and Accessibility Committee, Commissioner Monroe emphasized the critical importance of accessibility, particularly as aging and disability can create barriers to arts participation. She urged the Commission to develop an accessibility plan that includes services, inclusive spaces, assistive technologies, and compliance. She shared the VCA's recent accessibility progress, including professional development, updates to the NEA Accessibility Self-Evaluation Workbook, and the new accessibility resource page on the website. She thanked Commissioner Grabiec for stepping into his new role as Chair of the Diversity and Accessibility Committee.

VII. Commission Votes | FY26 Grants

Cathy Welborn provided an overview of the FY25 Advisory Panels. She expressed gratitude to the 47 Advisory Panelists for their time and thoughtful contributions in shaping the recommendations being presented for the Board's vote. In order to streamline the process of grant awards, the Board would employ block voting. The procedure is 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.

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

A. GOS Short Form Applications

Chair Parker shared an overview of the 59 GOS Short Form applications. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the (GOS) Short Forms for Medium and Large Organizations as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong
Seconded: Commissioner Garrett
All approved, motion passed

B. GOS Long Form Applications

Chair Parker shared an overview of the 102 GOS Long Form applications which were reviewed both by VCA staff and Advisory Panels.

Regions 6 & 7 | Advisory Panel #1

Commissioner Grabiec provided an overview of Regions 6 & 7 (Advisory Panel #1). Commissioner Grabiec highlighted the thoughtful discussion during this Panel, noting valuable expertise in marketing, folk, and dance. The Advisory Panel carefully considered rural cultures and environments when rating applications. They recommended stronger documentation of artistic excellence through video and suggested enhancing evaluation methods, particularly for accessibility outreach. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Regions 6 & 7 (Advisory Panel #1) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Grabiec
All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Pillion was absent

Regions 1 & 3 | Advisory Panel #2

Commissioner Armstrong provided an overview of Regions 1 & 3 (Advisory Panel #2). Commissioner Armstrong noted that this Advisory Panel was well-prepared and praised the recent addition of a lead reader to the Screening Session process. She described the Advisory Panel as both insightful and efficient, with key themes focusing on operational and financial challenges. Amanda Pillion joined the June Commissioner Board Meeting virtually at 9:52 a.m. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Regions 1 & 3 (Advisory Panel #2) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Grabiec
Seconded: Commissioner Armstrong
All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Pillion was absent. Commissioner Monroe abstained from the vote on STEPVA.

Region 2 | Advisory Panel #3

Executive Director Messick relayed Commissioner's Thaxton-Wards' comments regarding Region 2 (Advisory Panel #3). Commissioner Thaxton-Ward found the Advisory Panel's feedback balanced and encouraged greater diversity of Advisory Panelists. A recurring observation was that many organizations lacked evaluation methods, presenting an opportunity for VCA to offer professional development in this area. While Advisory Panelists provided critical input, their critiques were not always accompanied by recommendations. Chair Pillion shared that her virtual attendance rationale was personal business, which Chair Parker approved. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Region 2 (Advisory Panel #3) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong
Seconded: Commissioner Flowers
All approved, motion passed

Large Organizations | Advisory Panel #4

Chair Parker provided an overview of Large Organizations (Advisory Panel #4), which includes applicants with budgets exceeding \$1.5 million. She noted that two Advisory Panelists withdrew shortly before the Screening Session. Common themes, echoing Commissioner Grabiec's observations, included insufficient video/artistic samples and challenges in interpreting financial documents. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Large Organizations (Advisory Panel #4) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Armstrong
All approved, motion passed

Region 4 | Advisory Panel #5

Commissioner Zhao provided an overview of Region 4 (Advisory Panel #5). He appreciated the Advisory Panelists for their professionalism, responsibility, and thorough preparation, including careful review of each applicant's website and public presence. He commended VCA staff for effectively keeping the Screening Session organized and on schedule. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Region 4 (Advisory Panel #5) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Flowers
Seconded: Commissioner Grabiec
All approved, motion passed

Chair Parker asked to document Commissioner Monroe's recusal from the Regions 1 & 3 (Advisory Panel #2) which was STEP, VA

Region 5 | Advisory Panel #6

Commissioner Garrett provided an overview of Region 5 (Advisory Panel #6). As a new Commissioner, she noted that the process offered valuable insights into the breadth and depth of arts organizations in her region. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Region 5 (Advisory Panel #6) as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Flowers
Seconded: Commissioner Garrett
All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Grabiec, Riverviews and Commissioner Armstrong, Opera on the James

Operating Support for Small Arts Organizations

Chair Parker provided an overview of the 63 OSS applications, which are reviewed internally by VCA staff. There were fewer OSS applications this year compared to last, with some moving into GOS. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve Operating Support for Small Arts Organizations (OSS) applications as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong
Seconded: Commissioner Garrett

All approved, motion passed

Creative Community Partnership Grants

Chair Parker provided an overview of the 100 CCPG applications which are reviewed internally by VCA staff. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve CCPG applications as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Flowers
All approved, motion passed

Chair Parker requested a second motion to approve the CCPG applications recommended by VCA staff due to a recusal.

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Flowers
All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Grabiec, Prince Edward County, subgrantee Longwood Center for the Visual Arts

Community Impact Grants

Chair Parker provided an overview of the 41 Community Impact applications, which are reviewed internally by VCA staff and two Advisory Panels.

Commissioner Monroe provided an overview of Community Impact Advisory Panel #1. She noted that each Advisory Panelist asked thoughtful and challenging questions while demonstrating compassion for the projects under review. Commissioner Flowers provided an overview of Community Impact Advisory Panel #2. She shared that the Advisory Panelists were well-prepared and VCA staff kept the discussions on track, ensuring a positive experience for future Advisory Panelists. Regarding financial reviews, she recommended that the VCA provide Advisory Panelists with clear guidelines on how to assess budgets during evaluations.

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

Motion: Commissioner Monroe
Seconded: Commissioner Armstrong
All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Grabiec, Virginia Children's Book Festival.

Teaching Artist Roster Short Form Allocations

Chair Parker provided an overview of the 48 Teaching Artist Roster Short Form applications, noting that all Teaching Artists had been previously approved by the Commission Board. She shared that the new allocations for the Teaching Artist Roster now align with the allocation model used for the Touring Artist Roster. Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the Teaching Artist Roster Short Form allocations as recommended by VCA staff.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong
Seconded: Commissioner Garrett

All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Zhao, Kid Pan Alley

Chair Parker requested a second motion to approve Teaching Artist Roster Short Form allocations as recommended by VCA staff due to an additional recusal.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong

Seconded: Commissioner Garrett

All approved, motion passed

Recusals: Commissioner Zhao, Kid Pan Alley and Commissioner Monroe, Corey Vincent Holmes

VIII. FY26 Proposed Budget/Grant Allocations

Executive Director Messick shared there will be more firm numbers in August but in the meantime, VCA staff puts forth the proposed budget. The VCA received level funding from the state, a \$2 million one-time appropriation, and an additional \$150,000 for the Elegba Folklore Society through the City of Richmond. While awaiting NEA Partnership award notifications, the VCA remains hopeful for level funding once the federal budget is ratified. Since the VCA's GOS grant program serves as the core support for Virginia's arts organizations, the agency proposes allocating \$3.2 million from the General Fund to these awards in FY26. Additionally, if the agency receives NEA Partnership funds totaling \$781,485, 100% of those funds will be applied to the GOS Operating Support Grants this year. She notes that current carryforward is estimated at around \$250,000. She noted that the Education Impact program was eliminated at last September's Board meeting but will be revisited this summer during work planning, along with the Arts Fund. The VCA will continue to allocate funds directly to Virginia Humanities and Poetry Out Loud. Additionally, the Virginia Poet Laureate will receive an honorarium.

Chair Parker opened the floor for discussion:

Chair Parker asked for a motion that should the VCA not receive its NEA Partnership Agreement from the NEA by the time GOS grants are to be dispersed, the Board delegates the authority to VCA staff to pull up to \$781,485 from the \$2 million one-time appropriation to level fund GOS grants in FY26.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong

Seconded: Commissioner Flowers

Discussion: Commissioner Flowers inquired about the notification date, and Chair Parker confirmed it would be in July. Executive Director Messick explained that in this scenario, VCA staff would communicate that all Award Letters are fully funded by the state. Commissioner Flowers asked whether a specific date should be set for implementing this scenario. Commissioner Armstrong proposed amending the motion with an implementation date.

Casey Polczynski explained that NEA awards are typically announced in the spring; however, the timeline remains uncertain this year. She noted there may be additional stipulations tied to the NEA Partnership Agreement which typically takes 30 days to draw down once funds are awarded. Executive Director Messick shared notifications of their approval would be shared following the Board meeting, and that Awards would be disbursed as early as the start of the fiscal year. Cathy Welborn asked if the award amount would be outlined in this notification. Commissioner Armstrong emphasized the importance of promptly notifying organizations of their award amounts, given the current climate of uncertainty. She asked that the VCA reassure grantees that lack of NEA funding will not affect them, as state funds will cover any potential shortfalls. Commissioner Flowers added that establishing a date would help communicate a clear timeline for grantees. Commissioner

Armstrong suggested July 24.

Abigail Gump confirmed that the state has discretion over how funds are disbursed, as permitted by code. If the terms of state or federal funding change, the agency can communicate those updates at a later date.

Chair Parker called for a motion to amend the original motion by setting July 24, 2025, as the latest date to notify GOS grantees of their award amounts.

Commissioner: Flowers
Commissioner: Armstrong
All approved, amendment of motion passed

Chair Parker revisited the motion that should the VCA not receive its NEA Partnership Agreement from the NEA by the time GOS grants are to be dispersed, the Board delegates the authority to VCA staff to pull up to \$781,485 from the \$2 million one-time appropriation to level fund GOS grants in FY26. The amendment to this motion states that this decision will be made by July 24, 2025.

Commissioner: Flowers
Commissioner: Armstrong
All approved, motion passed

Chair Parker asked for a motion to give discretion to the Executive Director to fund Poetry Out Loud at \$20,000 and Virginia Humanities at \$30,000 if NEA funds were unavailable in FY26.

Commissioner: Armstrong
Commissioner: Garrett
All approved, motion passed

IX. FY26 Slate of Officers

Commissioner Monroe, Chair of the Nominating Committee, proposed the slate of officers for FY26, with all current officers continuing in their roles: Parker as Chair, Armstrong as Vice Chair, and Flowers as Secretary. Chair Parker, Commissioner Armstrong, and Commissioner Flowers accepted the nominations, left the meeting, and no further nominations were made. Commissioner Monroe then called for a motion to approve the FY26 slate of officers.

Commissioners:
Monroe, aye
Pillion, aye
Zhao, aye
Grabiec, aye
Garrett, aye
All approved, motion passed

Chair Parker, Commissioner Armstrong, and Commissioner Flowers returned to the meeting.

Chair Parker thanked the Commissioners for their time and efforts. She invited Brett Bonda, President of Virginians for the Arts (VFTA), to provide public comment. Brett Bonda announced that, due to a new career path, he will be stepping down from VFTA. He shared that Geoffrey Kershner, CEO of the Academy Center of the Arts, has accepted the role of VFTA President. Bonda described Kershner as a strong arts leader and advocate who currently chairs VFTA's strategic planning efforts. The plan focuses on achieving \$1 per capita arts funding by 2030,

expanding statewide representation, increasing organizational capacity, and raising visibility for arts in Virginia. Bonda congratulated the VCA in securing a \$2 million one-time appropriation and thanked Fran Bradford at McGuire Woods for her bipartisan leadership in supporting VFPA's efforts. Chair Parker and Commissioner Armstrong expressed gratitude to Bonda for his long-standing contributions and dedicated service to the arts in Virginia. Executive Director Messick acknowledged Hannah Hughson from the Secretary of Education's office for attending the Board meeting.

X. Next Board Meetings

- September 24–25, 2025 – Lynchburg, VA
- December 10, 2025 – Virtual
- March 11–12, 2026 – Norfolk, VA
- June 16–17, 2026 – Richmond, VA

Chair Parker invited each Commissioner to share arts updates and events from their respective regions.

Commissioner Monroe thanked the VCA for the opportunity to serve and invited fellow Commissioners to visit her region. Commissioner Garrett shared that several summer concert festivals are underway in her area. Commissioner Flowers highlighted cultural events including the Poet Art exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art and multiple summer arts festivals. Commissioner Armstrong praised the Richmond Symphony and Virginia Opera's 'Loving v. Virginia' performance, which received special recognition from the VCA. She noted the Richmond Ballet has moved its series to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), currently hosting a Frida Kahlo exhibition and preparing for major renovations. Richmond's theatre scene, including venues like Firehouse Theatre and Richmond Triangle Players, remain vibrant throughout the summer. Commissioner Grabiec shared Farmville's family-friendly outdoor summer movie series and the upcoming July 3rd fireworks show. He highlighted the Longwood Center for the Visual Arts, which hosts the largest youth art exhibition in the state and upcoming memorial exhibition honoring Jack Blanton and featuring English silver and Virginia artists. Commissioner Zhao shared his experience attending residencies by VCA Teaching Artist Kid Pan Alley, praising their integration of music, art, and songwriting. He also noted the 'Raising Visionaries' exhibition at the Kennedy Center, noting the letter of support from Governor Youngkin and the First Lady. Executive Director Messick reminded the group that tomorrow is 'Loving Day' and shared that the First Lady's current 'Art Experience' at the Executive Mansion will close in August, with a new exhibition to follow. Chair Parker added that the 'Rooster Walk' Festival, one of the largest festivals in Virginia, is underway, featuring both art and music. She noted that Piedmont Arts is offering summer classes and workshops and highlighted strong work by a VCA Teaching Artist in this community. Commissioner Pillion reported that Barter Theatre's productions of 'Frozen' and 'A Few Good Men' will run all summer. She also mentioned the upcoming Virginia Highlands Festival in late July and August, the annual Galax Fiddlers Convention, and current exhibitions at the William King Museum.

X. Adjournment

Chair Parker called for a motion to adjourn the June Board Meeting.

Commissioner: Flowers
Commissioner: Armstrong
All approved, motion passed

The meeting adjourned at 11:47 p.m.