

**Visitor Studies Association  
Board of Directors Meeting  
May 12, 2007 – Chicago  
Minutes**

**Present:** Alan Friedman, Kathy McLean, Daryl Fischer, John Fraser, Kirsten Ellenbogen, Rita Deedrick, Mary Ellen Munley, David Anderson, Nikki Andersen, Larry Bell, Dorothy Chen-Courtin, Cecilia Garibay, D.D. Hilke, Lisa Hubbell, Julie Johnson, Jeff Kennedy, Judy Koke, Mac West

**Staff:** Randy Roberts

**Guests (Board Members-Elect):** Beverly Serrell, Carey Tisdal, Judith Larsen, Matt Sikora, Martin Storksdieck

**Absent:** A.T. Stephens, Sue Sturtevant, Kathy Wagner

**Call to Order**

Friedman called the meeting to order at 2:11 PM CDT.

**Approval of Minutes and Consent Agenda**

Friedman and Deedrick confirmed that the consent agenda for this meeting consisted of the minutes of the January 27-28, 2007, Board meeting; Treasurer's Report; and Association Manager Report. Andersen moved to accept the consent agenda, Koke seconded, the motion carried.

**Strategic Planning**

McLean and Fischer led the group through the next stage of strategic planning.

McLean began by briefing the Board and guests on the recent history of VSA strategic planning. Fischer reviewed VSA's mission and vision and resources. In response, Koke reminded us that we are trying to meet various needs of a wide variety of professionals at various times. Munley added that the Board must keep in mind that we are managing change, and we are shifting from an organization "born from a remarkable group of founders" to an organization encompassing more than one kind of professional. Our foundation will not be lost in trying to serve a broader membership, and we must be cognizant of this in communicating with members and others.

In a discussion about VSA resources, Bell pointed out that this is truly a working Board and each Board member contributes much time and energy. Fraser added that some Board members (six, by show of hands) add the support of their own staffs to VSA efforts. Friedman pointed out that many VSA members (who are not Board members) participate in VSA activities in some way and should not be discounted as resources. Johnson noted a fluidity to VSA's resources.

Fischer described this stage of strategic planning as an "exercise to build commitment to priorities, which we will select in light of our mission, vision, resources, and

environment.” She then guided us through an affinity diagram exercise centered on the following three questions:

Starting with our current resources, what one key initiative will help VSA serve a diverse group of professionals who share a common interest in what it means to be visitor-centered?

What is most needed in terms of member services and/or professional development opportunities that VSA is well-positioned to provide?

Building on VSA’s conference and membership, how can we achieve long-term financial health?

Fischer clarified that the five strategic issues that had been identified in earlier stages of strategic planning had been combined into these three questions.

After some discussion on next steps, it was agreed that Fischer, McLean, Koke, and Johnson will pull the diagram results together by tying them back to the original list of issues, and present results to committee chairs in time for review before the July Board meeting. It was further suggested that committee chairs come to the July Board meeting with draft goals (time specific and measurable) for review by the Board. Munley suggested that outgoing committee chairs begin transitioning with new committee chairs now, so that new committee chairs will be ready to continue work on strategic planning during the July Board meeting; she also added that the Executive Committee should provide structure for these transitions. Garibay confirmed that new committee chairs will be named in the coming few weeks.

### **Issue Consideration – Recruiting from Living-Collections Professionals**

On the request of VSA member, Maggie Esson, Fraser raised the issue of under-representation of living-collections professionals in VSA.

We all generally agreed that increasing membership from zoos and other related organizations seems reasonable. We brainstormed a few ideas about how we could prototype ways of cross-promotion and joint recruiting when Munley reminded the Board that the Board’s role is to refer (or not) this issue to a committee for review and recommendation. With that, Koke offered to work through the program planning template (that Chen-Courtin had provided in earlier meetings) with the Membership Committee.

### **Report – Definitions Project**

Friedman updated the Board about the “definitions project” on behalf of Marcella Wells. Wells has been formally representing VSA on this project of the National Association for Interpretation. The product of the project thus far is a website, [www.definitionsproject.com](http://www.definitionsproject.com), which outlines definitions for common terminology. Wells invites VSA Board Members to review the website and provide feedback to her.

Friedman encouraged all Board members to participate as improvement of this website will be beneficial to VSA. The deadline for submitting feedback to Wells is July 15.

## **Board Development Committee**

### Election Results

Garibay reported on a very successful first try at online balloting with 41% participation in this year's election, compared to 27% last time (which was not online). Garibay reported election results as:

- 133 voted for the slate, which was 100% of those voting (no one rejected the slate)
- There was one write-in vote

Garibay reported that we will be doing an orientation for new Board members including a breakfast at 8:00 AM on July 18 at the VSA conference in Ottawa; all Board members (new and continuing) are asked to attend. Garibay will also put together "Board books," and we all agreed that an online version would be useful for everyone and easier to distribute and update. It is the goal of the Board Development Committee to have the book completed in time for everyone to read before the conference so that the breakfast can be more discussion than presentation.

Garibay would also like to match incoming Board members with continuing Board members as mentors. Commitment would be communications perhaps once per month for several months and occasional after that. Interested Board members should contact Garibay via email.

### Committee meeting schedule at VSA conference, as related to recruiting committee participation by VSA members

Garibay expressed a need to improve how we channel people into committee work. VSA members are invited to learn about committees by attending a committee meeting during the annual VSA conference. However, committee meetings tend to get scheduled very early in the morning making it difficult for new members to attend. Roberts pointed out that "Thursday at lunch" is available for committee meetings at this year's conference.

Munley suggested a "committee fair" at the marketplace/poster session so that people can learn about committees in a less formal environment, and see all of the committees in one place. Deedrick agreed saying this may be less confusing than inviting those unfamiliar with committees to a "meeting" as an introduction to a committee.

While it is too late to schedule this for 2007, a "committee fair" could possibly be worked into the conference plan for 2008. In addition, Storksdieck suggested adding a list of committees and descriptions to conference material to help inform people about the committees. Friedman said that the opening sessions for the conference should include an invitation to all members to seek out committees.

## **Update – Professional Development Task Force**

Johnson updated the Board on the work of the Professional Development Task Force. They are in an environmental scan phase and are determining a working definition of “professional development” for the group to use. Johnson also reported that she is experimenting with electronic tools to facilitate meeting and learning, which is in-and-of-itself a learning experience. Their next step will be visioning, and she expects to have a more complete report for the July Board meeting.

#### **Update – NSF Professional Development Grant**

Bell reported that we have not yet received a decision from NSF about further funding (had expected to hear several months ago); but there is word that a positive recommendation has been made within NSF. Bell is hopeful that we will receive word of supplemental funding in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, the “group of eight” and Wells have revised materials per evaluation findings. Their next step (pending funding) is to recruit study participants, and they may do so at the VSA conference in Ottawa (will be a mock panel to review test submissions). Because of the delay in funding, the group will not have results in time for the summer Board meeting as planned; they hope to have results in time for discussion at the winter 2008 Board meeting.

#### **Issue Consideration – New NSF IRB Requirements**

Friedman introduced this issue by sharing that CARE has been discussing the “IRB issue” for a year and has asked VSA for our thoughts about it. This issue was brought to Friedman’s attention by VSA member, Minda Borun.

Garibay outlined the issue by explaining that NSF is tightening up requirements for proposals for IRB review for all studies that involve human subjects. While most universities have IRBs that museums can use when the project is affiliated with the university, museums and others without university partners must outsource IRB, and there are few outsourcing options. Some museums are finding it difficult to find an IRB that will take their work because many IRBs are based on clinical work and cannot relate to informal education. Concerns include:

- IRBs based on clinical models may change the nature of our work.
- Museums and other institutions connected to universities will have an unfair advantage in receiving funding
- There is a lack of standard models of ethical practice

Johnson clarified that NSF has always had an IRB requirement, but many museum studies were deemed “exempt” by NSF program officers. The change is that NSF has recently said that program officers can no longer make that decision and studies must be reviewed by an IRB to be declared exempt.

Fraser further clarified that many people don’t understand that you need an IRB to be declared exempt. He sees VSA’s challenge as demystifying IRB for our members, and

he wondered if VSA can create a reasonable review process. Koke added that this could be a revenue opportunity for VSA.

Anderson cautioned against VSA serving as an IRB. Speaking from a university perspective, Anderson called IRB “a tricky and dynamic business” and relayed that his university must meticulously track legislation to keep up on requirements. He also cautioned that IRB certification carries with it perceived assurance of protection; that we would protect a museum if some legal issues were to come up. We would have to be very careful to say we are only providing opinion about ethics, and not assurance of protection.

Hilke added her reservations about VSA getting directly involved as an IRB, and she suggested VSA think about finding an organization that does IRB for social sciences and suggest they service VSA member organizations.

Friedman concluded the conversation by saying that VSA’s role in the IRB issue is worth investigating further. On Munley’s suggestion, Friedman formed a task force with the charge of gathering accurate and clear information to share with our membership; to investigate technical assistance opportunities for members; and to articulate the advantages and disadvantages of VSA forming its own IRB or subcontracting to a third-party IRB that members could use. Fraser also suggested the task force include a professional advisor for expertise and perhaps look for a planning grant to fund their work on this issue. Tisdal agreed to share task force responsibilities with Borun; Friedman will approach Borun about serving on this task force.

### **Issue Consideration – Exploring Joint Conference Support with Other Organizations**

Fraser asked the Board to consider how joining forces with other organizations might fit into our larger strategic planning. As a specific example, Andersen reported that VSA was approached by the Association of Midwest Museums about supporting each other’s conferences perhaps with joint or concurrent conference venues. The Board then brainstormed questions that would need to be addressed about this or other similar ventures. The questions included:

- Membership fit
- Scale
- Experience
- Timing
- Risk assessment for sponsor/funding
- Risk assessment for narrowing ourselves instead of expanding
- Is there a model that allows us to expand regionally
- To what extent would this change the content of our programs
- Does “joint” mean back-to-back or integrated
- Could we consider this as a model for exploring regional work
- What is the risk of cannibalizing our own group
- What additional work would a “joint” conference be for our staff/committees

Andersen said the earliest we could consider such a venture would be 2010. Ellenbogen pointed out that the Association of Midwest Museums conference will be in Minneapolis in 2010, and her institution will likely be involved (and Ellenbogen will be VSA Board President at that time).

Andersen said the Conference Committee will explore these questions and bring the issue back to the Board in July.

### **Announcements**

Friedman reported that the Academic Competitive Council Report has just been released (and forward to the Board via email). Friedman emphasized the importance of this report to VSA in that it seems to recognize that randomized controlled studies are impractical for many informal education programs. He encouraged all to read the report.

Friedman also announced that NSF has commissioned a guide as to what is acceptable summative evaluation, and VSA's Garibay is one of the authors, and other VSA members are also involved.

McLean reported that [www.exhibitfiles.org](http://www.exhibitfiles.org) is up and encouraged broad members to see how it can link to the VSA website or otherwise be used to VSA's advantage.

West reported good news from the Resource Development Committee in that we have exceed the fundraising target for the annual conference, though he noted that many Board member fundraising assignments remain unfinished. He said that this is an indication that – while we are doing well – we could be doing much better.

### **Adjourn**

Fraser moved to adjourn; Deedrick seconded; the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM CDT.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Rita Deedrick, Secretary