

Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board
Virtual via ZOOM
Science Museum of Virginia
2500 West Broad St, Richmond VA 23220



Meeting Minutes

May 9, 2024

8:00 am – 12:00 pm

In Attendance:

Board Members Present: Amy Sabarre (Chair), Amy White, Victoria Chua, Chris Dovi, Rashid Farrell, Amy Thompson, Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer, Casey Roberts,

Ex-officios and Staff: Zach Jacobs (Deputy Secretary of Education), Ada Sue Siler (Science Museum of Virginia Staff), Emily Salmon, Dr. Anne Petersen (VDOE Office of STEM & Innovation Science Coordinator), William Reid (Secretary of Labor Office)

Guests: Deb Love, Office of Attorney General
Dr. Susheela Shanta

Topics:

- Welcome
- Status of Federal grant fiscal agent
- Memorandum of Understanding with Virginia Department of Education
- Application package feedback
- Budget allocations
- Subgrantee recommendations discussion
- Public Comment

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Ms. Sabarre called the meeting to order at 8:03am. She welcomed everyone and noted a quorum was present.

Ms. Sabarre reviewed the agenda for the day.

Ms. Sabarre took a moment to review the vision and mission of the board, including the enabling legislation for the board.

Status of Federal grant fiscal agent

Amy Sabarre discussed the status of the federal grant fiscal agent, Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). The two main changes requested by VDOE are related to staffing, which VDOE is not able to manage directly, and concerns regarding their capacity to oversee the grant. VDOE suggested sub-granting the funds to another fiscal agent, minus the required fee.

Amy Sabarre also mentioned edits made to the grant application for grants.gov, emphasizing the importance of meeting deadlines. The timeline dictates the submission of a draft by May 15th, preferably by the end of the current week, allowing ample time for review and approval. The final application must be submitted by June 7th, a task that cannot be undertaken by Amy Sabarre herself.

Anne Petersen provided additional information on the timeline and stressed the need for alignment with VDOE's vision for increased chances of approval, although she couldn't guarantee approval herself. She offered advisory support but clarified her inability to speak on behalf of leadership.

In addressing potential concerns, Amy Sabarre expressed the need for a contingency plan in case VDOE decides not to proceed. She inquired with Zach Jacobs about any leads, to which he responded that conversations were ongoing but nothing definitive had been decided. He emphasized the importance of ensuring readiness for success, particularly from a legal standpoint. There are uncertainties regarding the possibility of changing the fiscal agent.

Amy Sabarre then discussed seeking guidance from the offices of Senators Warner and Kaine on changing the fiscal officer. While it is possible, it may not align with the required timeline, potentially necessitating an extension. The process involves approval from the offices of Senators Warner and Kaine, which takes time and is subject to determination regarding the feasibility of changing the fiscal officer.

Zach Jacobs inquired about the subcontractor process with Senators Warner and Kaine, emphasizing that the selected fiscal agent must adhere to federal guidelines and legislation for subgrant selection.

Amy Sabarre and Deb Love conferred, with Deb Love emphasizing the necessity for federal funds to pass through the state before reaching a subgrantee. She expressed unfamiliarity with precedents for directing funds to private entities.

Deb Love clarified that the selected entity must function as a contractor, outlining the need for a specific scope of work for the subgrantee's use of the funds.

Anne Petersen discussed the possibility of bidding out the funds if another state agency isn't viable, suggesting that an LEA (Local Education Agency) could be a potential option, which is a school division.

Amy expressed concern about the consequences if VDOE couldn't continue as the fiscal agent, fearing the loss of funds.

Chris Dovi encouraged a focus on positive outcomes rather than dwelling on negatives, expressing optimism about the process.

Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer inquired about the timeline and the possibility of an extension. Amy mentioned exploring options for negotiation with VDOE for temporary fiscal agency status.

Amy queried Anne about indirect costs, with Anne stating that 8% is the maximum allowed for federal funds.

Anne mentioned her limited experience with indirect costs on pass-through funds and agreed to consult a business associate for the indirect rate for budgeting purposes.

Billy Reid expressed concern about the timeline without a fiscal agent, prompting Amy to outline the immediate steps, including submitting grant application language to VDOE by the following week for review.

Amy White acknowledged the importance of having a backup plan.

Zach Jacobs mentioned uncertainty regarding the timeline but hoped for clarity by early next week.

MOU with VDOE

Amy Sabarre clarified that the Scope of Work and MOU with VDOE is not a legally binding document but rather a draft intended to initiate discussions. She emphasized that it may not be finalized before the application submission deadline.

Chris Dovi suggested including background information, while Susheela Shanta inquired about editing privileges as an emeritus member. Deb Love clarified that emeritus members could provide input but only through the public comment section.

Chris Dovi suggested using the Board's comments as negotiation points with VDOE. Amy Sabarre expressed a preference for a motion to incorporate edit options, with Casey Roberts clarifying that the motion would empower Amy Sabarre to facilitate the edits. Chris Dovi sought clarification on where authorization was needed for Amy Sabarre to take action on the MOU and Draft Application.

After verifying quorum, Casey Roberts motioned to authorize the board chair to incorporate edits from the current document for the MOU and grants.gov application, negotiate with VDOE, with Chris Dovi providing the second. The vote was taken by chat, with all members approving without discussion. Motion carries.

Application Package Feedback

Amy Sabarre initiated a discussion on the grants.gov application packet process, highlighting the collaborative review process with access for all to comment and edit. She expressed gratitude to Anne Petersen for her partnership in the process and mentioned her focus on the budget information. The group provided collective input on various sections of the application.

Anne Petersen emphasized the significance of a strong abstract, stressing its role in influencing determinations. Chris Dovi emphasized demonstrating impact on K-12 education and STEM standards, while Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer emphasized the need to illustrate statewide impact. Dr. Susheela Shanta stressed connecting students and teachers through hands-on learning and workforce bridges.

Chris Dovi suggested mentioning workforce partnerships and expanding descriptions to align with the teacher curriculum. It was suggested to include Governor Younkin's Executive Order 30 on AI and to incorporate computer science standards being reviewed by VDOE. Amy Sabarre shared thoughts on aligning with VDOE goals.

Feedback was sought on the performance measures section, with Amy Sabarre clarifying length requirements for the project narrative and abstract. Equitable resource distribution and regional hub goals were discussed, with Amy Sabarre confirming the phased approach.

Further discussions ensued on personnel specifics, hub definitions, and alignment with original goals. Zach Jacobs emphasized consistency in terminology usage, while alternative terms like "workforce pathways" and "pipelines" were proposed.

Anne Petersen mentioned career competencies, and Emily suggested wording adjustments. The conversation shifted to integration with community colleges and higher education to break down silos and enhance communication.

Break

The group broke at 9:49 am and returned at 10:02 am.

Budget Allocations

During the discussion, Amy Thompson inquired about the timeline for the budget and performance period, prompting Amy Sabarre to suggest extending the period to 23 months if funds are granted in September. This extension requires justification. Amy Sabarre suggested hiring a consultant temporarily before employing an executive director once sustainable income is secured. Casey Roberts questioned the employer for the contract, with Chris Dovi clarifying it would be the sub-grantee. Discussions ensued on determining staffing salary and role expectations. Suggestions for a project manager and coordinator were made by Rashid Farrell and Anne Petersen, with hourly rates discussed by Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer. Deb Love cautioned about establishing boundaries regarding hiring to ensure no conflict of interest.

Regarding the budget, discussions covered staffing costs, fringe benefits, and reimbursements. There was debate over equipment expenses and web site costs, leading to adjustments. Swag items were discussed, with federal grant regulations noted. The role of the TIES group in partnerships was mentioned. Summits, legal services, and other budget items were deliberated, with attention to indirect costs and teacher training stipends.

Amy Sabarre clarified that budget adjustments can not be made post-application submission.. Anne Petersen mentioned the flexibility in the budget is before submission. Chris Dovi suggested seeing assistance from grants.gov. Amy Sabarre will make minor budget adjustments before final submission, and Deb Love confirmed previous motions covered ongoing scope of work.

Subgrantee Recommendations

During the discussion, Amy Sabarre brought up the possibility of other options for a sub-grantee to receive federal funds passing through VDOE. Anne Petersen recommended a State Agency as the preferred avenue, with a 501c3 organization being another option. Various institutions such as George Mason University, Southwest Virginia Community College, and New College Institute expressed willingness to assist. Chris Dovi suggested focusing on southwestern and western Virginia. Anne Petersen highlighted the need for a competitive bidding process if selecting an agent outside of a state agency. Amy Sabarre mentioned other potential partners interested in collaborating.

Amy Sabarre asked Anne Petersen whether a subgrantee needed to be named or if expressing intent was sufficient for the application. Anne Petersen confirmed that stating intent was adequate. Southwest Center was identified as the primary option.

Chris Dovi motioned to authorize Amy Sabarre to take action, follow up and converse with potential subgrantees on behalf of the Board, with Anne seconding the motion. The vote was taken by verbal affirmation, with all members in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment and New Business

Ms. Sabarre asked for any public comment. None heard.

Ms. Sabarre asked for any new business.

Discussions revolved around scheduling future meetings, both virtual and in-person, over the summer.

During the discussion, Amy Sabarre brought up the possibility of changing the date of the next meeting from June 21, 2024, to an alternative date.

Deb Love noted that members hold over their term until the new appointee is named and qualifies.

The date of July 1, 2024, was suggested, with Amy White recommending Roanoke as the meeting location. Another date proposed was June 18, 2024.

It was decided to confirm the dates via email.

There was a final call for any remaining questions.

Adjournment

Ms. Sabarre adjourned the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 11:37am. The next meeting will be held on June 18 2024 or July 1, 2024. The meeting notes were recorded by Ada Sue Siler.