



APPROVED Minutes

Science Museum of Virginia
Finance and Business Operations Committee Meeting
Forum
2500 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23220

January 16, 2025
11 a.m.

Present: Dr. Denise Walters, Gina Burgin, Patricia Nicoson, Jeff Bentley, Cristina Ramirez, Ram Venkatachalam

Staff: Rich Conti, Ash Harris, Courtney Moyer, Timshel Purdum, Angela Wright, MJ Benson and Ada Sue Siler.

Other Attendees: Lauren Coleman, Office of the Attorney General

Welcome, Call To Order and Approval of October 17, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Ms. Burgin welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m.

Ms. Burgin called for a motion to approve the October 17, 2024, meeting minutes. Ms. Nicoson made the motion. Dr. Walters seconded it. The motion was called by voice vote and all voted in favor of approving the October 17, 2024, meeting minutes as presented.

Director's Report

Mr. Conti introduced Lauren Coleman as the new representative from the Attorney General's office, replacing Deb Love. He also introduced Angela Wright as the new Director of Finance. Ms. Wright brings significant experience in handling audits and other financial matters, and she is expected to strengthen the finance team with her expertise, including her background at the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB).

Mr. Conti reviewed the following:

- During the first half of the year attendance continues to grow and positive financial trends are evident.
- The Science Museum's financial success is not solely measured by attendance, but also by maintaining a strong reserve of funds.
- There is a significant focus on quality control within the state, and the agency recently underwent an ICQ audit from the APA, followed by a DOA review. One area identified for improvement is fixed assets.
- The Science Museum has established a solid relationship with the state comptroller and is in a good financial position.
- Revenues are strong, and the Foundation, which currently holds a significant cash reserve, contributes additional funds.
- The Science Museum operates leanly but has made thoughtful hires in key positions. Attracting talent in a competitive market has been essential, but difficult.
- Progress on the Northern Virginia Science Center continues. The \$62M construction contract will be signed shortly and the team is ready to mobilize. The project has a 22-month construction schedule. Attention will shortly shift to finalizing the exhibit package, which will be completed by Roto.

Mr. Bentley inquired about the Foundation's investment strategy, specifically asking about moving funds from Spider and exploring new investment avenues for the \$32M endowment. He also asked about TIFF's performance. Mr. Conti clarified that TIFF is not a hedge fund. TIFF's performance has matched the market, while Spider has underperformed.

Ms. Nicoson asked about the construction schedule, and Mr. Conti confirmed that the 22-month contract includes a two-month buffer, aligning with the Science Museum's 2027 50th anniversary celebrations. The agency will enter a major fundraising phase for 2027 and is revisiting its brand architecture. A variety of events will be held to mark the 50th anniversary, with significant efforts to promote the occasion.

Trustee Financial Summary Review and FY25 Through December

Ms. Moyer provided an overview of the financial figures:

- The Science Museum has seen an increase in admission revenue compared to the same period last year.

- Facility rentals remain strong, and the facility has impressive event spaces. To capitalize on this, there are plans to allocate funds toward advertising these spaces, which could lead to further growth.
- Personnel services costs are higher due to the addition of in-house housekeeping and security staff, as well as the hiring of full-time employees.
- The Science Museum maintains a policy of holding \$1M in working capital and \$500K in a Trustee Discretionary Fund.
- There is a need to "churn" some of these funds and a transfer request for the Trustee Discretionary Fund will be made later today.

Mr. Bentley commented positively on the numbers and Ms. Nicoson inquired about the projects for which funds will be requested. Mr. Conti stated that these will be discussed in the 3 p.m. meeting.

Capital Projects and Maintenance Reserve

Mr. Conti highlighted the following:

- The Science Museum's historic building faces several maintenance challenges.
- The maintenance reserve allocation for this year is \$1.2M, with \$1.6M allocated for next year. These funds are specifically earmarked for maintaining the historic building. Several projects are currently in progress to utilize these funds.
- The parking deck project will remain open for another year, with a final construction expenditure of \$9.1M.
- Essential, non-glamorous maintenance tasks, such as HVAC and plumbing repairs, are critical to maintaining the building. The goal is to proactively address these issues rather than waiting for failures to occur.
- In addition to HVAC work, improvements will also be made to the building's doors and windows.
- The state has approved expansion of The Green project. The East Green will be funded through special funds.

During the discussion, Mr. Vencatchalam inquired about federal grants. Mr. Conti clarified that the Science Museum does not currently have any federal grants, but mentioned that applications have been made to IMLS and NASA. Ms. Purdum added that the Science Museum is selective in applying for federal grants. Ms. Burgin asked if programming is adjusted around grants, and Mr. Conti responded that if a relevant grant is forthcoming, the Science Museum may adapt its programming to align with it.

Business Operations Report

Ms. Moyer provided a review of attendance for key events.

- Overall, laser shows have been successful, with all performances selling out, and require minimal staff effort. The seven evening performances attracted 1,512 attendees and generated \$28,674 in revenue. Upcoming shows will feature Bowie and Beyonce. The Science Museum is also incorporating family-friendly offerings into the laser show schedule, which previously focused on evening events.
- The Model Railroad Show had 11,220 attendees, representing a 10% decrease year-over-year. However, member attendance increased by 5%, reaching 38% of total visitors. The event generated \$107,675 in revenue, an 8.5% decline from the previous year. The attendance for this event remains within the ideal range of 11,000–12,500 visitors.

Ms. Moyer reviewed upcoming exhibitions and films:

- Garner Gallery Exhibitions
 - *Towers of Tomorrow with LEGO® Bricks*: February 1–August 24, 2025
 - *The Power of Poison*: in contract review for October 4, 2025–April 19, 2026
 - *Rescue*: in contract review for July 3, 2026–January 17, 2027
- Dewey Gottwald Center Exhibitions
 - *Ultimate Dinosaurs*: May 31–September 1, 2025
 - *Survival of the Slowest*: May 23–September 7, 2026
- Films
 - *Wings Over Water* - giant screen film opened October 1, 2024
 - *Superhuman Body* - giant screen film to opened November 1, 2024
 - *Dinosaurs of Antarctica* - giant screen film to March 1, 2025

Ms. Nicoson inquired about *Rescue*, and Ms. Moyer clarified that it focuses on the science of safely rescuing people in situations such as water-related incidents, building collapses, and natural disasters.

Ms. Burgin asked whether the Science Museum partners with other organizations for promotions. Ms. Moyer confirmed that they do, when there is a logical connection with community partners, and that such collaborations are actively pursued.

Ms. Burgin also asked about the Foundation's involvement in partnership and sponsorship opportunities. Ms. Moyer explained that the Foundation plays a role in seeking partnerships for bookings that are planned in advance. Mr.

Vencatchalam then asked if the Trustee Discretionary Fund transfer would cover marketing opportunities like this, to which Ms. Moyer affirmed that it would.

Ms. Moyer also noted that the timing of the summer film schedule is adjusted to align with related exhibitions. Mr. Conti added that the Science Museum continuously shifts its touring gallery spaces to keep the guest experience fresh.

Mr. Conti presented the proposed Trustee Discretionary Fund Transfer.

Resolution #001-2025

Approval to allocate funds for marketing needs, guest research and leadership training.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees to approve all transfers from the Trustee Discretionary Fund. Management is requesting the following actions:

Allocation of \$150,000 to support advertising to increase awareness and drive attendance to the summer 2025 touring exhibition, Ultimate Dinosaurs.

Allocation of \$50,000 to create collateral and purchase advertising to increase awareness and help increase sales of Science Museum special event rentals.

Allocation of \$8,000 to implement new guest research surveys designed to gauge guest satisfaction and identify areas for improvement.

Allocation of \$50,000 for leadership training and coaching for executive, senior and informal leaders within the agency focused on transformative leadership to drive personal and organizational growth.

Mr. Conti asked for questions and discussion.

Mr. Conti reviewed the financial logic behind getting ahead of expenditures, highlighting the success of special events and the Science Museum's desire to continue growing in a positive direction. He emphasized that the Science Museum is a data-driven organization and aims to gather feedback from guests. Mr. Harris discussed the importance of guest research, such as understanding why guests would recommend the Science Museum and identifying menu items they want to see.

Mr. Harris also touched on leadership training as an opportunity for growth, noting that a consultant from VCU will help train leaders annually, providing coaching akin to therapy for leaders. Additionally, a 360-degree survey will assess how staff feels about their leaders, with the goal of improving leadership and retaining invested employees. Mr. Conti supported the idea, stating that this

investment would be worthwhile in equipping staff with the necessary skills to succeed.

Ms. Wright commented that the 360-degree survey is very helpful, while Dr. Walters noted that such training has proven to be a transformative experience, boosting self-confidence and prioritizing skills. Mr. Vencatchalam inquired about conferences in the museum sector, to which Mr. Conti responded that the Science Museum participates in the American Alliance of Museums and Association of Science and Technology Centers, which both hold annual conferences. These conferences historically focus less on leadership development; however, this will be a focus that will increase in the future.

Ms. Burgin asked if the Science Museum is a member of Leadership Metro Richmond (LMR), and Mr. Conti confirmed that it is not. Ms. Burgin shared that LMR is working to expand its presence in the city and strengthen its efforts.

Ms. Burgin called for a motion to recommend the TDF transfer to the Full Board of Trustees as presented. Ms. Ramirez called the motion to approve the transfer which was seconded by Mr. Bentley. Ms. Burgin called for a vote, which passed unanimously without objection. Motion carries.

Looking Ahead

Mr. Conti gave the following points:

- Monthly analysis and refinement of plans is ongoing.
- It is a transitional year for the Foundation, with a new director and changes to its structure. The upcoming lunch meeting will focus on these developments.
- Emphasis was brought to the importance of positioning for the 2027 anniversary, which will influence both strategic and communication planning to not only celebrate the museum's past, but also to shape the vision for the next 50 years.
- Several design team projects are underway, including the East Green, train sheds, Northern Virginia Science Center exhibits, the expanded Animal Lab, the anechoic chamber, and stair redesigns, all of which require careful management and balancing of priorities.

Adjournment

Ms. Burgin called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Venkatchalam called the motion and Ms. Ramirez seconded the motion. A vote was taken and it passed without objection. The meeting was adjourned at 11:42 a.m.

The next Finance and Business Operations Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday June 18, 2025.