



APPROVED Minutes
Quarterly Board of Trustees Meeting
2500 West Broad Street

October 16, 2025
3 p.m.

Present: Dr. Denise Walters, Patricia Nicoson, Gina Burgin, Fran Bradford, Thomas Gottwald, Ram Venkatachalam, Jeff Bentley (Virtual), Dr. Robert Winn, Elsa Falls, John Ivins, Karey Malyszko, Amishi Amin, Dr. Nisha Patel

Absent: Dr. Irma Becerra, Kate Hight

Staff: Rich Conti, Courtney Moyer, Ash Harris, Timshel Purdum, Martha Quinn, Maggie Gercken, and Ada Sue Siler.

Other Attendees: Lauren Coleman, Office of the Attorney General; J.C. La Riviere, Office of the Attorney General; Emily Parker, Toutman Strategies; John Wick, Science Museum of Virginia Foundation Board of Directors

Welcome and Approval of Board Positions

Rich Conti, called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m. and verified a quorum was present.

Mr. Conti asked the group to review the proposed slate of officers: Dr. Robert Winn as Chair, Karey Malyszko as Vice Chair and Jeff Bentley as Secretary. A call was made for questions, none heard.

A motion to approve the slate of officers was made by Ms. Bradford and seconded by Mr. Bentley. A vote was taken by verbal affirmation, all in favor, none opposed. Motion carried.

Dr. Robert Winn continued to preside over the meeting.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Robert Winn resumed the meeting and provided an overview of the day's activities, which included a finance meeting at 11 a.m., a lunch presentation by brand consultant Joe Smith, an Education Committee session at 1:30 p.m., and a tour of the *The Power of Poison* exhibition.

Dr. Winn reaffirmed his belief in the Science Museum's mission, emphasizing that the agency serves as a catalyst and a gathering place for people to learn, engage with science, and enrich their lives. Dr. Winn expressed confidence in the Science Museum's strong leadership and vision and affirmed his commitment to maintaining the tradition of transparency established by David Mills and Dr. Denise Walters.

Introduction of New Members

Rich Conti welcomed two new board members and invited them to introduce themselves.

- **John Ivins** introduced himself as an attorney with Hirschler. He shared that his involvement with the Science Museum began many years ago through a professional connection, leading to his service on the young professionals Board and later on the Foundation Board of Directors. He expressed enthusiasm about returning to contribute once again.
- **Dr. Nisha Patel**, an ophthalmologist from Northern Virginia, shared her lifelong passion for science and expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming Northern Virginia Science Center.

Approval of Previous Minutes

Dr. Winn requested that the group review the minutes from the previous meeting and open the floor for any edits or discussion. No comments or edits were raised. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Dr. Walters and seconded by Ms. Nicoson. A verbal vote was conducted, and the motion carried unanimously.

Troutman Strategies

Mr. Conti noted that the Science Museum engaged Troutman Sanders (now Troutman Pepper) to provide strategic guidance and assist in securing state funding.

Through their coaching and advocacy, the Science Museum successfully built relationships within the General Assembly. Elizabeth Parker of Troutman Pepper / Troutman Strategies provided an overview of the representation in the Virginia General Assembly.

- Ms. Parker noted that early voting is already underway. The ballot includes races for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General.
- Current political composition:
 - Senate: 21 Democrats, 19 Republicans
 - House of Delegates: 51 Democrats, 48 Republicans
 - Executive Branch: Republican Governor and Attorney General
- Ms. Parker reviewed Republican and Democratic tickets and polling data; Virginia historically favors non-incumbent candidates and often votes opposite the presidential outcome.

- All 100 House of Delegates seats are up for election, with potential Democratic gains in eight Republican-held districts; early voting trends will continue to be monitored.
- The General Assembly budget process remains complex and driven by a small group of key decision-makers.
- The Science Museum is requesting \$2 million in operating support for the Northern Virginia Science Center and planning funds for campus improvements.
- Key influencers in the House and Senate Appropriations Committees were identified as essential to funding efforts.
- With the incoming governor and resulting administrative turnover, the Science Museum must rebuild relationships with new officials to sustain advocacy progress.

A call for questions and discussion was made. No questions or comments were raised.

Director's Report

Mr. Conti presented a comprehensive review covering organizational metrics, Foundation updates, ongoing projects, events, and brand architecture.

- The Science Museum reported record attendance and revenue from the summer touring exhibition.
- The Foundation has experienced a period of renewal under Martha Quinn and John Wick, newly appointed President of the Board of Directors, with 10 new members joining and strong fundraising results.
- Numerous facility improvements are underway, including upgrades to windows, doors, and exhibits.
- Mr. Conti emphasized that the Science Museum is fundamentally a communications organization, and its brand serves as its voice and identity. The Science Museum is in collaboration with Joe Smith to enhance and advance the museum's brand.
- The Northern Virginia Science Center project is making meaningful progress; the building is expected to be finished by December 2026. Staff move-in is anticipated for early 2027, with friends and family preview events in spring 2027 and a public opening in June 2027.
- The exhibit package is extensive, with interactives under development and prototyping in progress.
- Staffing plan includes maintaining operations in Richmond with 10–15 full-time staff at the Northern Virginia site.
- An East Green preview event held this month showcased early designs (currently at 10% completion) developed in partnership with Marvel. The project aims to create an immersive, phased greenspace for community engagement.
- The agency is preparing for 2027, with refined brand messaging, new events, a major fundraising campaign, and activities celebrating the Science Museum's 50th anniversary.
- A Special Joint Board Meeting is scheduled for October 29, 2025, to include a hard hat tour of the Northern Virginia Science Center facility and a joint session with the Northern Virginia Science Center Foundation.

Ms. Falls asked about the size of the Northern Virginia Science Center. Mr. Conti responded that the facility will be approximately 70,000 square feet, an efficient design without restaurant or retail space.

Ms. Burgin inquired about bus and public transportation options in Northern Virginia. Mr. Venkatachalam replied that a Metro station is nearby, the Dulles Airport is four miles south, and residential areas surround the site.

Ms. Bradford asked how the project budget figures were developed—whether starting from a lump sum or itemizing projects first. Mr. Conti explained that the process was a combination of both approaches.

Ms. Falls asked what “MoAK” stands for. Mr. Conti clarified that it refers to “Minds of All Kinds.”

No further questions were raised.

Foundation Report

Mr. Wick reviewed the following:

- A key goal under way is to strengthen engagement across both Richmond and Northern Virginia.
- The Foundation’s ambition is to serve as the Science Museum’s “brain team,” focusing on deeper involvement, donor relationships, and event participation.
- Recently 10 new directors were appointed.
- Mr. Wick highlighted the importance of events as key donor cultivation opportunities.
- The Trustees were encouraged to:
 - Become members and visit the Science Museum.
 - Bring guests to exhibitions and events.
 - Attend both Foundation and Science Museum events.
 - Meet informally with other trustees and directors.
 - Actively support and advocate for the Science Museum’s mission.
- Ms. Quinn reviewed the financial state of the Foundation.
- The FY25 fundraising totals were slightly below the previous year; however, there was a notable increase in individual donors and strong corporate contributions.
- Since joining the Foundation on July 1, 2024, Mrs. Quinn has overseen the implementation of new donor and finance management software to improve transparency and tracking.
- Ian Coppage was introduced as the new Senior Director of Finance and Administration.
- The new strategic plan focuses on four key objectives: raise funds for the 50th anniversary campaign, strengthen Foundation Board excellence, build sustainable funding, and deliver donor-centric experiences that clearly demonstrate philanthropic impact.
- The Foundation reported a cash balance of \$8.8 million and an endowment value of \$25.7 million.

- Support provided to the Science Museum represents 21% of the Science Museum's total expenses.
- Newly implemented financial management software offers real-time insight into both incoming funds and expenditures, enhancing transparency and supporting more effective strategic planning.
- Additionally, ongoing monitoring of team performance allows the Foundation to identify specific areas for improvement as well as examples of success within its operations.

Dr. Winn inquired about the balance between organizational and corporate giving.

Ms. Quinn responded that the Foundation receives a combination of both, noting that Henrico County and similar entities provide meaningful contributions.

Operations Report

Mr. Harris provided an update on operations.

- Work is currently underway to restore and upgrade the Science Museum's windows and doors. The windows will be fully functional once again, with all old paint removed and replaced with durable new finishes. Additionally, the main doors will be updated to meet ADA compliance standards.
- *Orbit*, located on Level 0 and dedicated to the theme of space, is in the cost analysis phase, with project initiation planned for the first quarter of 2026.
- The Science Museum has contracted with BeanSprouts to operate the on-site café. Construction plans for renovating the café space are in development, and the project is currently under state review for approval.
- Mr. Harris also noted that Barry Lewis retired after 42 years of service.
- Two additional staff members, Bobb Shires from Tech Solutions and Jennifer Morehead from Enterprise, have also retired from the agency.
- This transition presents an opportunity to reassess roles and departmental structure to improve efficiency and alignment.

Finance and Business Operations Committee Report

Ms. Burgin reviewed the Trustee Summary, detailing the Science Museum's financial position through September.

- The Science Museum has experienced a strong start to FY26.
- Admissions have increased by 6.2%, and memberships are up by 5.1% compared to the previous year.
- This growth was primarily attributed to the success of the summer exhibition.
- Revenue from the gift shop, facility rentals, and concessions currently appears lower, which is due to a delay in processing the planned equity transfers from the gift shop.
- The Science Museum is in the process of establishing a separate Enterprise revenue account to independently track revenues and expenses for its enterprise operations.

- Rental income is currently below budget but is expected to recover once the lease payment for the adjacent property is received.
- All other budgeted revenue categories are tracking as projected.
- Most expense categories are in line with the approved budget, with minor variances attributed to timing differences.
- Salaries are currently under budget due to staff turnover and vacancy-related savings; however, these savings are partially offset by increased hourly wages required to meet summer operational demands.
- Insurance expenses exceed budgeted amounts as a result of higher-than-expected Workers' Compensation premiums, driven by both staff growth and a small number of claims from prior years.
- The agency maintains just over \$3 million in working capital, of which \$1 million is encumbered for *Speed* exhibition improvements.
- The Trustee Discretionary Fund holds a balance of just under \$1.7 million, with approximately \$800,000 already encumbered for current projects.

Mr. Venkatachalam inquired about the Workers' Compensation claims mentioned in the financial report. Ms. Moyer explained that one incident involved a staff member who was bitten by a rat, and another occurred while facilities staff were moving equipment and materials.

Mr. Venkatachalam also asked about staff turnover and the current hiring ratio. Mr. Conti responded that several long-term employees have recently retired or reached retirement age, and the departure of even a single experienced team member has a significant operational impact. He noted that each time a position becomes vacant, the organization takes the opportunity to reorganize and redefine roles as needed. Overall, turnover is primarily seen among hourly wage staff, while the core full-time team remains stable.

Ms. Moyer added that while the process of filling full-time positions has been intentionally slow, this approach ensures that the Science Museum is hiring the right candidates. She emphasized that the leadership team is comfortable with the pace, prioritizing quality and long-term fit over speed in recruitment.

Attendance and Upcoming Exhibitions

Ms. Moyer reviewed recent attendance figures:

- From July through September, the Science Museum recorded a total visitation of 176,789 guests, representing an 11.8% increase year-over-year.
- Group attendance totaled 7,528 participants, which reflects a 3.4% decrease compared to the same period last year. Despite this slight decline, September 2025 marked the second-highest group attendance month on record.
- The *Ultimate Dinosaurs* exhibition achieved exceptional results, drawing 84,462 guests, a 74.3% increase over last summer's attendance.
- The exhibition generated upcharge revenue of \$247,152, representing a 45.6% increase from the prior year.

- Total revenue during the exhibition period reached \$1.35 million, an increase of 24.4% year-over-year.
- A review of upcoming exhibitions and films was given:
 - Exhibitions
 - Garner Gallery
 - *Power of Poison*: October 4, 2025–April 19, 2026
 - *Science Unplugged*: May 29–June 30, 2026
 - *Rescue*: July 13, 2026–January 17, 2027
 - Dewey Gottwald Center
 - *Survival of the Slowest*: May 23–September 7, 2026
 - *Food: Science, Culture, Cuisine*: May 22–September 6, 2027
 - Films
 - *Encounters in the Milky Way*: Opened October 1, 2025
 - *Arctic: Our Frozen Planet*: Opens November 1, 2025

Education Team Report

Ms. Purdum presented the Education Committee Report, highlighting programs and participation from July through September. She noted that the Education team continues to experiment with new approaches to engage a broader range of audiences in meaningful, creative ways. Ms. Purdum provided many program highlights including:

- Volunteers contributed a total of 14,459 hours, representing a 21% increase over FY24.
- The Teen Leadership Program operated over two semesters, engaging 26 unique participants who collectively contributed 1,820 hours.
- Museums for All allowed 38,886 guests to visit through the access initiative.
- The agency is partnered with five library systems through the Library Pass Program, resulting in 1,129 guest visits.
- The Education team achieved 9,643 points of contact through off-site and community events.
- Senior programming engaged 320 guests in age-inclusive science activities.
- The Science Museum welcomed 72,318 school and group visitors to Broad Street Station. Sixteen percent of these programs were supported by grants and donations.
- The Science Museum hosted nine weeks of summer camp, serving 530 children. The program achieved a net revenue of \$99,895.
- *The Forge* engaged 31,352 guests in Maker Challenges and 2,824 guests in Maker Workshops.
- *The Mix* has 531 enrolled members, hosted 17 school-year events and workshops, and conducted 13 weeks of summer programming.

Ms. Nicoson raised the topic of discontinuing the use of single-use plastics, referencing health impacts associated with microplastics and a related course by Megan Wolfe. She observed that more individuals are becoming engaged in sustainability efforts and suggested incorporating

these concepts into Science Museum programming. Ms. Purdum agreed, stating that such ideas align closely with the Science Museum's new interpretive plan.

Dr. Winn added that recent scientific research on microplastics has revealed emerging data linking plastic exposure to cardiovascular health issues, underscoring the importance of public education in this area.

New Business and Adjournment

A call was made for additional comments or questions, followed by a review of the upcoming meeting date on October 29. With no further new business, Dr. Winn called for a motion to adjourn, which Ms. Malysko made and Ms. Bradford seconded. The meeting adjourned at 4:22 p.m.

A special meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 29, 2025.