



Approved Minutes
Education Committee
2500 West Broad Street

January 22, 2026 1:30
p.m.

Present: Dr. Irma Becerra (virtual), Jeff Bentley, Gina Burgin, Thomas D. Gottwald, John C. Ivins Jr., Patricia Nicoson, Dr. Nisha Patel, Dr. Denise L. Walters, Ram Venkatachalam

Staff Present: Rose Basom, Rich Conti, Cat Erdas, Maggie Gercken, Ash Harris, Karen McKenzie, Courtney Moyer, Martha Quinn, Ada Sue Siler.

Other Attendees: J.C. La Riviere, Office of the Attorney General, Cindy Marquez

Mr. Ram Venkatachalam called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

Welcome and Approval of Minutes

Mr. Venkatachalam welcomed the attendees to the meeting and asked if all members have reviewed the October 2025 meeting minutes and if anyone would like to make comments or corrections.

No discussion heard. Mr. Venkatachalam called for a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Dr. Walters made the motion to approve and Ms. Nicoson called the second. All voted in favor to approve the minutes, none opposed. Motion carried.

Inspiration Index

Dr. Rose Basom presented the Inspiration Index and upcoming events.

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- The Model Railroad exhibition was successfully presented, attracting strong attendance.
Two Sunrise Science Events were held, covering the topics of the SR-71 Blackbird and Forensic Toxicology.
- Multiple outreach weekends took place during the Halloween season, including Trunk or Treat events and Camp-Ins. One Camp-In focused on "Girls in Medicine," highlighting various career pathways in the medical field.
- Laser shows experienced excellent attendance throughout the reporting period.
- A new Hockey Robot exhibit was installed in the Speed gallery.
- Dr. Basom reported that all construction plans for the Orbit exhibit have been finalized, with construction scheduled to begin in early 2026. Upon completion, other exhibits ready for installation can be installed.
- Proposals were solicited and reviewed for the refurbishment of select areas of the Speed gallery.
- The avian sundial structure is currently being prepared for bronze casting.
- The refreshed design of the Human Gallery for the Northern Virginia Science Center was completed.
- A \$75,000 grant from the Roller-Bottimore Foundation was secured to refurbish the exterior of the rolling stock in the TrainYard and to replace the curtains in Car ONE with historically accurate materials.
- The final report for the ASTC and NASA Universe of Learning Grant for the Orbit exhibit was completed.
- In preparation for the 50th anniversary, Dr. Basom and the Collections team have begun collecting oral histories and conducted an evaluation at the Model Railroad Show to support the Broad Street Station interpretation project.
- A new all-day structure with the family friendly GLOW event during the day and then Science on Tap Neon Night for 21+ after hours.
- Marvel, the Landscape Architects for the East Green project will be speaking at our next Sunrise Science event on Landscape Urbanism.

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Upcoming Programs and Events

- January 20 - Senior Science: Slump Molds
- January 23 - Science After Darrrrrk
- January 27 - Senior Science: Slump Molds (part 2 glazing)
- January 29 - Sunrise Science: Landscape Urbanism
- February 7 - GLOW
- February 7 - Science on Tap: Neon Night
- February 10 - Senior Science: Dome Night
- February 12 - Laser Show: Prince
- February 14 - Teacher Open House
- February 27 - Minds of All Kinds
- March 2 - Now open seven days a week!
- March 7 - Curiosity Camp-In
- March 11 - Senior Science: Mosaic Coasters
- March 12 - Laser Show: Queen
- March 14 - Private Camp-In
- March 20 - Science After Dark: Storm Chaser
- April 7 - Senior Science: Beetle Pinning
- April 9 - Laser Show (artist TBD)
- April 15 - Up+Atom
- April 18 - Earth Day Festival

A video was shared to celebrate 13 years of the MiX. Three teens participating in the MiX programs have joined the staff, showing the impact of the program.

Lastly, Dr. Basom invited the board to experience Science on a Sphere after the meeting to highlight timely events.

Evaluation

Cat Erdas, Content and Evaluation Specialist, presented the most recent evaluation data and elaborates on the use of each one.

- Evaluation categories are aligned with grant and institutional requirements.
- Grant-required evaluations include:
 - LEGO: Learning Through Play Tool – final report completed
 - NASA Universe of Learning – Tactile Images evaluation
 - Museum field data helps compare performance with other institutions:
 - AAM Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
 - ASTC Annual Statistics

- Guest observations and surveys provide insight into visitor experiences and inform: Interpretive Plan, Net Promoter Score The Green, Phases 1 and 2, Teacher surveys
- Evaluations are conducted both to satisfy grant requirements and to guide museum growth and performance benchmarking.
- Data collection methods include observation, raw data collection, and surveys of guests and teachers.
- Data types include numbers, stories, and photographs; audiences can be general visitors or targeted groups.
- Evaluation scope may be project-specific or annual.
- Regarding The Green, staff evaluated engagement at multiple points since opening and expansion.
- Observed 183 visitors over two sessions and tracked engagement with QR codes.
- Adjusted QR code language for Spanish translation to improve engagement.
- Noted higher engagement with QR codes attached to specific features rather than placed randomly.
- Tactile Images and DBVI Evaluation were discussed.
- Staff conducted evaluations of Tactile Images with six blind and low-vision participants.
- Data collected during a focus group on Orbit displays using tactile images and audio descriptions.

Dr. Walter inquired about adding an image to the QR code in The Green. Cat Erdas responded, yes, each QR code is displayed on a stanchion with a cut-out image incorporated.

Karen McKenzie then presented a deep dive into school case studies, focusing on teacher and field trip data.

- Pre-visit surveys are administered to teachers to collect information on factors influencing field trip decisions; cost is the primary factor, followed by educational value.
- Post-visit surveys demonstrate a favorable experience for most teachers, with strong responses regarding exhibits' educational value and support for STEM concepts.
- Digital demos peaked during the pandemic and have declined as students returned for field trips.
Tracking the number of schools adding additional programs for an additional fee.

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- Observing which demonstrations teachers book more frequently; choices are influenced by group time and may include hands-on demos or dome shows.
- Data collection included compiling a nine-year database of organizations and schools visiting the museum.

Mr. Bentley asked if the Science Museum was able to dig deeper if there is disagreement with a visit? Karen McKenzie responded, not yet, but this is an area we aim to address in future evaluations.

Mr. Venkatachalam asked how have field trip costs changed over time? Cat Erdas responded that costs were lower during the pandemic but have increased since then.

Ms. Erdas asked the group “What does successful use of the East Green look like?”

Ms. Moyer mentioned focusing on how long visitors stay in The Green and how much time they spend.

Dr. Walters suggested a community science tie-in, such as observing particular insect or animal species or counting pollen.

Mr. Harris suggested adding seating options to allow for lingering.

Ms. Nicoson asked if water features might include frogs or insects. Dr. Basom clarified that the Museum intends to observe naturally occurring creatures, not stock animals.

Mr Bentley suggested referencing research data on successful outdoor museum spaces in other locations. Ms. Erdas highlighted studies from Sweden and China on features that increase engagement in green spaces.

Ms. Norwood-Marques recommended maintaining a serene focus.

Mr. Conti emphasized balancing passive, high-quality experiences without creating a “blockbuster” item, ensuring new features complement the Museum rather than detract.

New Business

Dr. Walters asked for any new business. None heard.

Adjournment

Mr. Venkatachalam called for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Dr. Walters, seconded by Mr. Bentley, and approved by unanimous verbal vote. Motion carries.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:09 p.m.

The Education Committee will meet again on April 16, 2026