

Date: _____

Approved: _____

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
DRAFT – Minutes of the Resources and Visitor Experience Committee
Wednesday, 3 December 2014, 8:30 am
Theater Level Conference Room #1

There were present:

William A. Royall, Jr., President
Margaret Irby Clement, Chair
Karen C. Abramson
Anne L. Battle
Mary Anne Carlson
W. Birch Douglass III
Cynthia Kerr Fralin
Margaret N. Gottwald
Thurston R. Moore
Dr. Claude G. Perkins
Michele Petersen
Pamela C. Reynolds
Charles H. Seilheimer Jr.
Dr. Shantaram Talegaonkar

By Invitation:

Alex Nyerges, Director
Dr. Lee Anne Chesterfield
Claudia Keenan
Rebecca Morrison
Patricia Van Tuyle
Tom Zydel

Absent:

Tyler Bishop
Terrell Luck Harrigan
Dr. Elizabeth Forsyth Harris
Dr. Monroe E. Harris, Jr.
Barbara Noble Howard
H. Eugene Lockhart
Mary Gray Shockey
Dr. Lindley T. Smith

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meg Clement, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:39am, welcomed the members of the committee and introduced new Trustee Michele Petersen of McLean, VA.

II. MINUTES

Motion: proposed by Ms. Abramson, and seconded by Mr. Douglass, to approve the minutes of the September 30, 2014 Resources & Visitor Experience Committee as distributed. Motion carried.

III. REPORTS

a. *Forbidden City* sales and marketing:

Claudia Keenan, Deputy Director of Resources and Visitor Experience, reviewed the success to date of the *Forbidden City* exhibition. Against a revenue goal of \$1.9 million, revenue to date totals approximately \$1.5 million. The exhibition has exceeded its fundraising goal by \$400k, partially thanks to both a successful gala and a crowdfunding program which raised \$61k against a budget of \$40k. Ms. Keenan remarked that her division plans to coordinate future crowdfunding campaigns to support various other projects. She noted that, while ticket sales are slightly behind after the Thanksgiving holiday, she is confident that the goal will be met.

Ms. Keenan also commented that her division continues to refine its strategy for creating sales projections, which will continue to improve based on the amount of data available.

b. *Hasui* tracking:

Ms. Keenan remarked that it is challenging to track attendance for exhibitions that are not ticketed, but that the data collected is attractive to funders, lenders and marketers. For *Hasui*, counter technology has been installed. Excluding staff, the exhibiton has welcomed 3,668 visitors. Ms. Keenan said that she is pleased with the counter technology and hopes to soon implement this technology in five other galleries.

c. Customer Service updates:

Ms. Keenan reported that the new “greeter” program has received positive feedback from visitors.

d. Other exhibitions marketing:

For the March 2015 banner exhibition, *The Art of the Flower*, Ms. Keenan and her staff have selected Padilla CRT of Richmond to coordinate advertising, and the Richmond-based firm Neathawk Dubuque and Packett will handle advertising for the upcoming exhibition *Japanese Tattoo*. Ms. Keenan and her team are still working to select an advertising firm for the *Johns/Munch* and *Kebinde Wiley* exhibitions. In response to Ms. Abramson, Ms. Keenan noted that there are both pros and cons to potentially instating an in-house creative services department, pointing out that the museum would still have to use a media buyer.

Ms. Keenan explained to the committee that her division has been testing exhibition titles in the marketplace, anticipating feedback from key segments such as lapsed

members and ticket buyers. She added that, in regards to the *Japanese Tattoo* exhibition, it will be challenging to break through to the local tattoo community, as it is a vastly different audience for VMFA. Ms. Keenan is excited to meet soon with local tattoo artists to brainstorm strategies to attract this segment.

In response to Ms. Battle, Ms. Keenan confirmed that she has met with the head of the 2015 World Road Cycling Championship to be held in Richmond and offered VMFA as a venue for wraparound events. The new VMFA Visitor Center at Robinson House will be open by that time to enhance the museum's appeal to this group.

e. Spring 2015 membership plan:

Ms. Keenan informed the committee that the museum boasts 36k members to date and has seen tremendous growth since implementing a customized membership program several years prior, with renewal levels reaching 80-85 percent. Membership Manager Tom Zydel reviewed upcoming changes to the membership structure that will be implemented in the spring campaign and showed the committee a new "choose your own membership experience" chart. He identified weaknesses of the current structure, to include cost value and confusion surrounding membership levels. In response to Mr. Royall, Mr. Zydel confirmed that VMFA sees a low return on investments made in direct mailing, and thus it has become a low priority.

As requested by Mr. Zydel, the committee relayed the following feedback:

- Ms. Battle commented that the membership structure could be clarified even further to minimize potential confusion.
- Trustees discussed at length how to best incorporate membership offerings to make the most out of VMFA's permanent collections.
 - Ms. Clement and Ms. Reynolds expressed desire to encourage the local community to visit VMFA permanent collections and offerings outside of banner exhibitions.
 - Dr. Perkins inquired as to whether the museum "refreshes" its permanent collections to create more interest, and Dr. Chesterfield responded that museum programming serves this purpose.
 - Mr. Douglass suggested improving electronic signage around VMFA campus to encourage visits to the permanent collections.
- In response to Dr. Talegaonkar, Mr. Zydel confirmed that VMFA's membership program is comparable with peer institutions, and that the docent program enhances community engagement.
- In response to Ms. Abramson, Ms. Keenan indicated that her division aims to grow both sheer membership numbers as well as encourage upgrades and renewals.
- Mr. Royall and Ms. Abramson discussed pricing for both student and out-of-town memberships; Mr. Zydel informed the committee that VMFA has roughly 1,000 out-of-town members.

Mr. Royall congratulated Ms. Keenan and her staff on the improvements made to VMFA's membership program, and Mr. Zydel thanked trustees for their valuable feedback.

f. Division reorganization:

The Government Relations staff, Ms. Keenan clarified, will now report to the Resources and Visitor Experience division, and membership and visitor services departments will combine under Mr. Zydel in his new role overseeing this merged department. She noted that VMFA has just hired a director of digital strategy, and creative staff such as graphic designers, writers and editors will now report to Ms. Keenan.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS/ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:47 am by Ms. Clement.