



Virginia Commission for the Arts
Commission Board Meeting
Virtual
December 10, 2025

Board Meeting Minutes

I. Attendees

- Commissioners: Barbara Parker, Frazier Millner Armstrong, Lou Flowers, Hayley Allison, Raven Custalow, Debbie Garrett, Alex Grabiec, Vanessa Thaxton-Ward, Tim Zhao
- Staff: Colleen Dugan Messick, Casey Polczynski, Shauna Friend, Cathy Welborn, Lo Bruner, Dawn LeHuray, Jack Siegel (Virginia Management Fellow)
- Attorney General's Office: Abigail Gump, J.C. LaRiviere, Attorneys
- Department of Education: Secretary of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera and Hannah Hughson, Communications Advisor

II. Call to Order

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. and provided a welcome. Abigail Gump introduced J.C. LaRiviere, who is looking forward to supporting the agency in his new role as the VCA's legal counsel.

Chair Parker conducted a Roll Call of Commissioners:

Parker, here
Armstrong, here
Flowers, here
Allison, here
Custalow, here
Garrett, here
Grabiec, here
Thaxton-Ward, here
Zhao, here

III. Approval of Minutes – September 2025 Commission Board Meeting

Chair Parker called for a motion to approve the September 2025 Board meeting minutes:

Motion: Commissioner Flowers
Seconded: Commissioner Thaxton-Ward

Parker, aye
Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Allison, aye
Custalow, aye
Garrett, aye
Grabiec, aye
Thaxton-Ward, aye
Zhao, aye

All approved; motion passed.

Executive Director Messick introduced Secretary of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera, who shared remarks commending the agency's progress and growth during her tenure. Secretary Guidera warmly noted that her first Board meeting was with the VCA. She emphasized the Administration's commitment to ensuring a smooth transition, so that VCA's operations continue to be strong and effective moving forward.

IV. Chair Update

Chair Parker provided a Chair update.

- VCA Code Update | Updated code is slated to be adopted in the upcoming General Assembly session. Once the policy team identifies the patrons, Executive Director Messick will inform the Board accordingly.
- FY26 Virginia Touring Grants | This grant program closed December 1 with awards totaling \$257,317. This is a notable improvement from FY25 which resulted in \$90,000 of unused funds. In contrast, only \$48,000 went unspent in FY26. Chair Parker noted that four municipalities (Amelia, Craig, Surry, and Sussex) remain to be reached in FY26. FY26 Virginia Touring grants will remain open for these specific counties and Executive Director Messick has shared grant information with legislators representing these localities to encourage participation.
- Staff Professional Development | Executive Director Messick and Deputy Director Polczynski attended the NASAA Executive Forum in November. Shauna Friend participated in a procurement conference. Looking ahead, the VCA plans to send Cathy Welborn, Lo Bruner, and Dawn LeHuray to the NASAA Assembly in 2026.
- NEA Panels | Colleen is serving as a NEA Panel Reviewer for Regional Arts Organization Partnership Agreement applications
- Upcoming deadlines for Commissioners |
 - December 19: State Mandated IT Training
 - February 2: Statement of Economic Interest Filing. The agency incurs a \$200 fine for each Commissioner who fails to meet the filing deadline.
 - VCA email passwords | Commissioners are encouraged to reset passwords in a timely manner before they expire.

Executive Director Messick shared that the NEA provides funding for state arts agencies to attend the NASAA conference. Commissioner Armstrong inquired about confirming completion of IT training, and Deputy Polczynski responded that she will provide further instructions to confirm completion as well as tips for easier login to VCA Commissioner email accounts.

Chair Parker moved that the Commission enter a closed session pursuant to Virginia Code sections 2.2-3711A(1) and 2.2-3711A(8) for discussion of appointment of specific public officers and for consultation with legal counsel. VCA staff left the Board meeting.

Chair Parker reconvened the Board meeting following the closed session, and VCA staff rejoined. Chair Parker shared her Certification motion: I certify that to the best of my knowledge that only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act as identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were discussed.

Parker, I so certify
Armstrong, I so certify
Flowers, I so certify
Allison, I so certify
Custalow, I so certify
Garrett, I so certify

Grabiec, I so certify
Thaxton-Ward, I so certify
Zhao, I so certify

III. Diversity & Accessibility Committee Update

Commissioner Grabiec, Chair of the Diversity and Accessibility Committee, shared an overview of updates.

- Accessibility Updates
 - VCA Accessibility Handbook | This handbook is now published on the VCA's Accessibility Resources webpage.
 - Accessibility Webinar Series | During October and November, the VCA hosted three accessibility-focused webinars in collaboration with Open Door Arts. The sessions provided an overview of legal requirements, actionable steps for organizations to improve accessibility, and industry-specific guidance, including the role and responsibilities of Accessibility Coordinators.
 - Self-Assessment Study Group | With 11 participating organizations, this study group will continue through March.
- Passport Program Updates
 - Virginia Voice | Deputy Director Polczynski shared that the VCA is moving forward with a new partnership with Virginia Voice which will utilize a portion of the agency's \$2 million appropriation to expand the Passport Program.
 - Library of Virginia | Jack Seigel shared a new partnership with the Library of Virginia and libraries across the Commonwealth to help promote the Passport Program. New marketing materials are now available for libraries to share with visitors, highlighting free or discounted arts programming available to WIC cardholders.
- NASAA Creative Aging, Creative Futures Grant
 - Grant Overview | Deputy Director Polczynski shared that the VCA is pursuing a NASAA Creative Aging grant totaling \$77,500 over a two-year period. Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) initiated a partnership with the VCA to support this effort.
 - Programming Elements
 1. Regranting Model – The VCA will regrant directly with Virginia Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), focusing on those serving underserved regions. This grant program will not be public-facing.
 2. Professional Development – Training opportunities will be provided for VCA Teaching Artists to strengthen their skills and expertise in Creative Aging.
 3. ArtWorks Conference – A dedicated Creative Aging session will be held at the 2027 ArtWorks Conference, bringing together AAAs, DARS, and VCA Teaching Artists. Honorariums will be offered to support attendance.
 4. Data & Legislative Strategy – In partnership with DARS and their Division of Aging Services (DAS), the VCA aims to leverage robust data on Virginia's aging populations to support future legislative funding requests.
 - Partnerships | VCA grantee and Teaching Artist Tidewater Arts Outreach has been identified as an ideal facilitator for carrying out grant programming with AAA's. Additionally, the VCA aims to support tribal Creative Aging programming, potentially in partnership with VA Native Arts Alliance. Deputy Director Polczynski expressed gratitude to Commissioner Custalow for her valuable contributions during the application planning process. She also noted that, since the grant award is funded through philanthropic sources, the VCA has greater flexibility in designing and delivering programming. If awarded, implementation could begin as early as March 2026.

- VCA Self-Assessment
 - Open Door Arts Accessibility & Culture Self-Assessment | VMF Fellow Jack shared that the VCA has completed an Accessibility self-assessment, which reviewed legal compliance, industry standards, and aspirational practices. The assessment highlighted that accessibility remains an ongoing journey and recommends staff participation to further strengthen efforts, particularly in relation to grant programming and digital communications.
- Accessibility Microgrants
 - A new grant program is proposed in the FY27 Guidelines for Funding, based on recommendations from the Special Fund Task Force. Accessibility Microgrants aim to support arts organizations in enhancing the accessibility of their programming, equipment, and facilities. Commissioner Grabiec looks forward to seeing new opportunities emerge through this program.

IV. Executive Director Update

Executive Director Messick provided an overview of agency updates.

- Office Move November 10 | VCA staff worked together to ensure a smooth transition to remote operations. Each team member now has a dedicated cell phone, and Deputy Polczynski is drafting a formal cell phone policy. Dawn is currently monitoring the main VCA line via her cell phone. Staff continues to meet in person every Wednesday, thanks to the support of partners at the Library of Virginia and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The lease for Reids Row has been signed, reflecting an increased cost of approximately \$23,000 compared to Main Street Centre. A budget request has been put forth to assist with these additional costs.
- Fiscal Updates
 - Internal Control Questionnaire (ICQ) | VCA completed an ICQ last spring and is anticipating the release of the final report. Shauna, Casey, and Colleen have reviewed the materials and found no major issues. Any flagged items, such as the Arts Fund, have been addressed.
 - W-9 Forms | The VCA is exploring software solutions to streamline W-9 form processing, making it more efficient for both applicants and VCA staff.
 - Electronic Funds Transfer | As part of modernization efforts, grantees are now encouraged to sign up for Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) to receive their awards. This shift comes in response to returned checks and mail delays. To support this transition, a webinar will be held in January to guide grantees through the EFT sign-up process.
 - SWaM Award | Shauna developed a comprehensive report as part of VCA's Small, Women, and Minority-Owned Business (SWaM) efforts. Her plan was recognized with an award at the state procurement conference as the VCA exceeded the 42% benchmark for engaging SWaM vendors.
- Grants
 - Advisory Panelist Honorariums | As part of the summer Community Roundtables, VCA is considering updating the Advisory Panelist honorarium amount, potentially increasing it to \$200 or \$250. In the past year, VCA engaged 69 Panelists and paid 63 Panelists a total of \$9,400.
 - Part-time P-14 position | With the addition of new grant streams supported by the \$2M appropriation, staff capacity needs have grown. To support this expansion, VCA is proposing a part-time P-14 position with plans to conduct interviews in May and onboard the new hire by July 1.
- Communications | Dawn LeHuray continues to do outstanding work sharing VCA news and engaging with constituents. Jack also supported the Gratitude Video Project, which was

shared with the VCA community. This newly developed community list includes grantees, Roster Artists, NEA staff, MAA staff, legislators, Local Arts Agencies, vendors, and other key partners.

- Holiday e-card – a festive e-card will be sent this December as a thank-you to the VCA community, recognizing their dedication and contributions throughout the year.
- Newsletter | The VCA newsletter continues to grow with 349 newly added subscribers. Dawn has also significantly expanded the VCA's social media presence, growing the VCA's Instagram following and revitalizing our Facebook and LinkedIn accounts.

V. Commission Votes

FY27 Guidelines for Funding

Chair Parker shared the VCA's current audit policy, which requires grantees with annual income over \$750,000 to submit an audit. The VCA is currently evaluating its financial documentation requirements for General Operating Support (GOS) applicants. The objective is to reduce unnecessary administrative and financial burdens on nonprofits while ensuring full compliance with both state and federal regulations. As part of the FY27 Guidelines for Funding approval, Chair Parker noted that an initial vote and discussion would be needed regarding potential updates to the GOS audit requirements.

Chair Parker moved that the Commission enter a closed session pursuant to 2.2-3711A(8) for consultation with legal counsel regarding VCA's legal obligations in administering grant programs. VCA staff left the Board meeting, with the exception of Executive Director Messick and Senior Grants Officer Cathy Welborn.

Chair Parker reconvened the Board meeting following the closed session, and additional VCA staff rejoined. Chair Parker shared her Certification motion: I certify that to the best of my knowledge that only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act as identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were discussed.

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Grabiec, I so certify
Thaxton-Ward, I so certify
Zhao, I so certify

Chair Parker made a motion for the Board to approve the Executive Committee's recommendation to raise the audit threshold for General Operating Support (GOS) applicants to \$1 million.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong
Seconded: Commissioner Flowers

Parker, aye
Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Allison, aye
Custalow, aye

Garrett, nay
Grabiec, aye
Thaxton-Ward, aye
Zhao, aye

All approved; motion passed.

Chair Parker provided an overview of additional FY27 Guideline updates:

- Inclusion of accessibility language (Cover & Guiding Principles)
- GOS | increased minimum funding levels to \$5,000 (currently \$3,500)
- OSS | increased grant awards (currently \$2,500) and two-tier structure:
 - Income of \$20,000 - \$74,999: \$3,000
 - Income of \$75,000- \$150,000: \$4,000
- Addition of Accessibility Microgrants
- Roster Artists who have been removed may reapply after two grant cycles
- Advisory Panels & Conflict of Interest Policy
- Minor language updates regarding internal review processes

Chair Parker opened the floor for discussion and shared one additional update: records for any funded programming must be retained for five years, as part of the reporting requirements.

Chair Parker made a motion to approve the proposed FY27 Guidelines for Funding.

Motion: Commissioner Thaxton-Ward
Seconded: Commissioner Custalow

Parker, aye
Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Allison, aye
Custalow, aye
Garrett, aye
Grabiec, aye
Thaxton-Ward, aye
Zhao, aye

All approved; motion passed.

Funding for Proposed FY26 VA250 Impact Grant Awards

Chair Parker provided an overview of FY26 VA250 Impact Grants. She noted that the program was highly competitive, with 28 applications submitted across six regions, including three new applicants and one former grantee. The requests reflected a broad spectrum of arts disciplines and organizational sizes. Of the total requests, 64% are recommended to receive either partial or full funding for a total of \$75,000 in proposed awards. At the September Board meeting, \$25,000 of VCA funding was approved for this program, for a total investment of \$50,000. The funding sources to meet \$75,000 are as follows:

- NEA: \$25,000
- VA250 Commission: \$15,000
- Additional VCA funding: \$35,000

Commissioner Garrett asked whether serving on the VA250 committee would present a conflict of interest. Legal counsel, J.C., responded that a conflict would arise only if the individual

stood to personally benefit in some way. Chair Parker made a motion to approve an additional \$25,000 to support all recommended applicants and ensure statewide participation, reallocated from \$49,000 in unspent FY26 Virginia Touring Grant funds to support VA250 Impact Grant initiatives.

Motion: Commissioner Armstrong
Seconded: Commissioner Grabiec

Parker, aye
Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Allison, aye
Custalow, aye
Garrett, aye
Grabiec, aye
Thaxton-Ward, aye
Zhao, aye

All approved; motion passed.

Small & Rural Arts Communities Network – Pilot Project

Chair Parker presented an overview the Small & Rural Arts Communities Network (SARA) pilot as recommended by the Special Fund Task Force. The pilot aims to support communities with limited arts infrastructure and no current VCA grantees. Focusing on region 8, it will test small-community models such as pop-up events, partnerships with libraries and YMCAs, volunteer-led governance, mobile arts delivery, and micro-revenue approaches. Leadership and implementation partners include Randolph College and Geoffrey Kershner (Small Town Big Arts), the Department of Public Transformation, and Virginia Tech. If approved, VCA will execute an MOU with Randolph College for payment in FY26.

Chair Parker made a motion to approve \$35,000 for the SARA Pilot as outlined in the December Board book.

Motion: Commissioner Garrett
Seconded: Commissioner Grabiec

Parker, aye
Armstrong, aye
Flowers, aye
Allison, aye
Custalow, aye
Garrett, aye
Grabiec, aye
Thaxton-Ward, aye
Zhao, aye

All approved, motion passed

VI. Public Comment and Next Board Meetings

Chair Parker invited public comment from Virginians for the Arts (VFTA) President, Geoff Kershner. Geoff shared that VFTA is gearing up for Arts Advocacy day on January 22 and plans to meet with legislators. They plan to advocate for level funding, and request a \$2 million special

allocation, similar to last year. Commissioner Armstrong asked if patrons had been identified at this point in the process. Geoff Kershner said he would reach out to Fran Bradford to check on the availability of the information and follow up with VCA.

Commissioner Grabiec looked forward to supporting the SARA pilot, particularly in Region 8, where he serves as a Commissioner. Geoff Kershner welcomed Commissioner Grabiec's deeper insights into this region and noted that VCA governance will help clarify Commissioner roles within the project. Executive Director Messick shared that VCA is actively collaborating with partners, and once those relationships are formalized, Commissioners will be invited to participate in more detailed planning.

Executive Director Messick introduced Hannah Hughson, Communications Advisor to the Secretary of Education. Hannah expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to observe the VCA's work, noting her personal and professional commitment to its mission, and her role in ensuring a smooth transition into the next administration. Chair Parker thanked Hannah for her continued support.

Chair Parker thanked Commissioners and staff for their time and efforts. She shared the upcoming calendar dates for the remaining FY26 Commission Board meetings.

- March 11 – 12, 2026 – Norfolk
- June 16 – 17, 2026 – Richmond

VII. Adjournment

Chair Parker adjourned the December Board Meeting at 11:34 a.m.