

**Virginia Commission for the Arts
Minutes, October 15, 2004
Library of Virginia
Richmond**

Members Present: Dr. Lucius Ellsworth, David Briggs, Gary Grant, Susan Hirschbiel, Bonita Lestina, E. A. McMath, Roddy Moore, Jackie Stone, Rod Taylor, Beth Temple, Deborah Valentine, and Eve Wilson
Members

Absent: Will Trinkle

Staff Present: Peggy Baggett and Foster Billingsley

Guests: Nolan Yelich, Library of Virginia; Alan Albert, Trish Poupore, and Marcia Thalhimer, Virginians for the Arts; and Meg Clement

Introduction

Dr. Ellsworth, Chair of the Commission, called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. and welcomed the Commissioners to Richmond, particularly the new members of the board.

Nolan Yelich, State Librarian, welcomed the Commissioners to the Library and described the role and responsibilities of the Library and State Archives. He described the impact of the state budget cuts of the past two years on the Library staff and services.

The Commissioners then introduced themselves and described their involvement in the arts. Dr. Ellsworth announced that Will Trinkle had been responsible for a major fundraising activity in New York on October 14th and was unable to attend the Commission meeting as a result.

Advocacy Workshop

Alan Albert explained the process by which the state budget is adopted. Marcia Thalhimer and Trish Poupore gave a history of Virginians for the Arts and described the relationship between that organization and the Commission. Alan Albert then reviewed the advocacy strategy for the coming year. Meg Clement shared her perspective of the pressures on members of the General Assembly and her thoughts on effective ways to communicate with legislators.

Business Meeting

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the June meeting. The motion was adopted with the new Commissioners, who had not attended the meeting, abstaining.

Report of the Executive Committee

Peggy Baggett presented the recommendation from the Executive Committee to add language to the Commission Policy Manual about the role of observers and representatives of applicant organizations at Commission meetings. The new policy makes formal the existing practice of the Commission whereby the Chair determines when guests may address the Commissioners during a business meeting. Bonita Lestina made a motion to approve the Executive Committee recommendation, with an adjustment in the proposed language from "representatives" to "a representative." The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Following a suggestion made at the June meeting, the Executive Committee had authorized the Commission staff to offer Technical Assistance funding of up to \$3,000 in 2004- 2005 to the arts organizations identified by the Commission at the June meeting as being in serious financial difficulties. Peggy Baggett reported that the Virginia Stage Company had been the only organization to take advantage of this offer to date.

Pending Grant Applications

The Commission then discussed the three General Operating Support grant applications on which action had been deferred from the June to the October meetings.

Arlington Arts Center. There was a lengthy discussion about the situation with the Arlington Arts Center, a long time grantee of the Commission. The Commission had awarded an operating support grant to the Center in June of 2003. In the spring of 2004 the Commission staff learned for the first time that the staff of the Arts Center had been let go in September of 2004 and that the organization had not met the grant requirement of presenting at least three different programs for the public in 2003-2004. The financial problems were caused by the unexpected delays in the renovation of the building. In the discussion the following points were made.

The Arts Center has been an important part of the Arlington cultural community for many years. The renovation delays were caused by problems with the County government construction process and not by actions of the Arts Center board of directors. There is no question of bad faith or mis-management by the Arts Center board of directors. It is understandable that the board of directors was not familiar with the grant conditions. However, had the Commission been notified of the changes in staff and program plans in a timely manner, a condition of the grant, the Commission staff would have directed the Arts Center board of directors to return the 2003-2004 grant funds to the Commission. With the Arts Center now hiring new staff and again presenting programs to the public, the Arts Center is clearly eligible for funding in 2004-2005. The Commission would be setting a bad precedent by ignoring the failure to comply with the grant conditions.

Roddy Moore made a motion to award funding for 2004-2005 as a Priority 3 organization. The motion was seconded. In response to a question, the Commission staff noted that Priority 3 funding would be a token amount. The motion was defeated, 1-Yes, 10-No.

Bonita Lestina made a motion to award funding for 2004-2005 as a Priority 2 organization and to require the Arts Center to return the 2003-2004 grant funds. The motion was seconded. Roddy Moore then offered an amendment to the motion that the 2004-2005 grant should not be paid until the Arlington Arts Center had completed its three programs for the public this year. The amendment was seconded and approved, 10-Yes, with David Briggs abstaining. The amended motion was then approved 10-Yes, with David Briggs abstaining.

Bristol Ballet. At the time of the grant review in the spring of 2004 the Bristol Ballet had temporarily closed its school and not renewed the contract of the artistic director. The Ballet has now hired a new artistic director, reopened the school, and announced three public performances in the coming year. Some Commissioners expressed concern about the stability of the organization overall. Beth Temple made a motion to approve funding for 2004-2005 as a Priority 2 organization, and the motion was seconded. Susan Hirschbiel offered an amendment to the motion that the 2004-2005 grant should not be paid until the Ballet has completed its three programs for the public this year. The amendment was seconded and approved unanimously. The amended motion was then approved unanimously. ShenanArts. Peggy Baggett reported that

ShenanArts had not provided the additional information requested by the Commission in order to make a decision on the 2004-2005 grant request. She asked if the Commissioners would like to give ShenanArts an extension until the December meeting, but the consensus was not to hold the funds any longer.

Major Arts Institutions

Peggy Baggett reported on the response of two of the major arts institutions, the Richmond Symphony and the Virginia Stage Company, to the requirement of mid-year progress reports. She had met with the staff members of the Richmond Symphony to discuss the Commission concerns about the need for greater racial and ethnic diversity within the organization. She and Susan Hirschbiel had met with the board leadership and new Managing Director of the Virginia Stage Company to discuss progress in achieving financial stability.

Requests for Reconsideration of Grant Decisions

The Commissioners discussed three requests for reconsideration of grant decisions made at the June meeting.

Jefferson Choral Society. After reviewing the panel comments and letter from the Choral Society requesting reconsideration of the decision to award Priority 3 funding, the Commissioners stated that there did not appear to be factual errors in the panel comments and that disagreement on the part of the applicant with the panelists' opinions was not grounds for changing the grant decision. David Briggs made a motion to affirm the Commission grant decision. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Virginia Gateway Center for the Arts. Susan Hirschbiel made a motion to affirm the Commission decision not to award the Project Grant and to encourage the organization to apply again next year with the information provided in the letter of July 14, 2004, included in the application. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Renaissance Music Academy. The Commissioners agreed that the additional information provided by the applicant was helpful in understanding the role of the organization in the community. David Briggs stated that the reviewers had made their grant decision based upon the original application and then made a motion to affirm the Commission grant decision. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

David Briggs then recommended that in the future a copy of all grant notification letters to arts organizations be sent to the board presidents as well as the staff contacts. The Commissioners agreed by consensus with this suggestion.

Artist Fellowships

Peggy Baggett presented the recommendations of the fellowship panels. Roddy Moore recommended that the guidance to the panelists should be made more explicit about the need to support emerging as well as established artists.

Eve Wilson made a motion to accept the recommendations of the Poetry Fellowship Panel A. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously. Eve Wilson made a motion to accept the recommendations of the Poetry Fellowship Panel B. The motion was seconded and approved 10-Yes with David Briggs abstaining.

Deborah Valentine stated that she had been impressed with the panel process for reviewing the fellowships in painting. Jackie Stone made a motion to accept the recommendations of the Painting Fellowship Panel. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Susan Hirschbiel asked if the Commission was adapting to digital representations of the work by visual artists rather than slides. Peggy Baggett reported that the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation had created a study group to make recommendations to all state arts agencies and the National Endowment for the Arts on the best way to review applications for fellowships in the visual arts in the future.

Old and New Business

Beth Temple reported on the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation workshop on accessibility to the arts and on the recent Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation board meeting. She reported that the organization is engaged in many valuable and interesting programs that will benefit Virginia, as well as the rest of the region.

Lu Ellsworth read a draft resolution thanking former Commission staff member Sharon Wilson for her years of service. E. A. McMath made a motion to approve the resolution, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Lu Ellsworth then reported that Gary Grant had agreed to Chair the Policy/Planning/Program Committee for 2004-2005 and that Beth Temple had agreed to Chair the Arts in Education Committee.

Peggy Baggett distributed the draft agenda for the Art Works for Virginia conference in January. Lu Ellsworth stated that it is important for all Commissioners to attend the full conference as hosts and as leaders of the statewide advocacy effort.

Peggy Baggett reported on the local arts agency study group. There have been two meetings of the study group which is still working on proposals for specific strategies to address the objectives of the study group. Several of the new Commissioners asked for more background information on the local arts agencies of the state, and Lu Ellsworth asked the Commission staff to send this information after the Commission meeting.

Future Meetings

Lu Ellsworth announced that the December 1-2 Commission meeting will be held at Ferrum College and the March 30-31 meeting will be held in Hampton Roads. The June 7-8 meeting is not confirmed but may be held in Abingdon.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:14 p.m.