

Vietnam Education Foundation

**Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors**

November 18, 2011

**Vietnam Education Foundation Headquarters
2111 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22201**

List of Attendances in Person:

1. VEF Board members:
 - Mr. Chris Fussner (Chair), Ms. Sandy Dang, Dr. Isaac Silvera
 - Mr. Basil Kiwan (Treasury); Tim Marshall (State);
 - Mr. Ethan Saxon (Senator Richard Blumenthal's office)
2. VEF staff:
 - Dr. Lynne McNamara, Executive Director
 - Ms. Christie Dam, Finance and Administration Assistant
 - Ms. Sandarshi Gunawardena, Senior Program Officer
 - Dr. Peggy Petrochenkov, Program Officer
 - Ms. Lana Walbert, Director of Finance, Accounting, and Administration
3. Via Teleconference
 - Dr. Steve Maxner, VEF Board member
 - Dr. Phuong Nguyen, VEF Country Director
 - Mr. Steven Pappas (Education)

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes – Mr. Fussner

Mr. Fussner called the meeting to order and, after introductions, called for approval of the minutes of the July 15, 2011, Board meeting. On motion made and duly seconded, the motion was unanimously approved.

Item for Board Approval

Dr. McNamara explained that one of the 2011 Visiting Scholars had requested deferral until 2012, which requires a formal vote by the Board. Although there would be no additional expense incurred since the funds approved in the 2011 budget would not be expended, the vote is required because the funds would be expended in the 2012 budget and would exceed the authorized line item in the Visiting Scholars account. Without discussion, on motion duly made and seconded, the motion to approve the funding for 2012 was unanimously approved.

Meeting with Ambassador from Vietnam to the United States

Dr. McNamara reported on a meeting with Ambassador Cuong, which was arranged by Dr. Binh at the Vietnam Embassy in Washington, D.C. Most of the VEF staff attended, as did Board members Sandy Dang and Steve Pappas as well as the Department of State Vietnam Desk Officer, Gary May. Mr. Pappas reported that Ambassador Cuong was very interested in the VEF programs and suggested that the Minister of Education visit the United States to meet with the Secretary of Education. The Ambassador referred to the proposed legislation from Senator Kerry, and Mr. Pappas noted that it was made clear to the Ambassador that passage of the legislation might diminish VEF funding. The Ambassador was aware that the funding for VEF could be negatively affected, but voiced his support of the establishment of an American university in Vietnam.

Dr. McNamara noted that a summary of the meeting was available at the VEF online library. She added that, at his request, she had met with Dr. Binh, and mentioned that VEF had written letters to Senator Kerry's staff about the legislation. Dr. Binh requested copies of those letters, a request that Dr. McNamara feels should be reviewed by the Board. After discussion, there was agreement not to send copies or summaries of the letter for now.

Executive Director's Top Line Report – Lynne McNamara

Dr. McNamara began her report with a brief discussion of events on the Hill, noting that the recent awareness of another bill directed at VEF had been somewhat unsettling to staff since it introduces unknowns as to the future of VEF. She added that staff had been reassured that VEF would support them in whatever career decisions they made if any felt the uncertainty was not acceptable. Dr. McNamara also noted that Representative Sanchez had established a VEF Advisory Committee and that, although no staff or Board member had been in contact with Sanchez, it might be appropriate to establish such contact and discuss the Advisory Committee with her.

Dr. McNamara commented on several areas of excellence including the completion of a successful external annual audit; the partnership with the U.S. Embassy in running the annual Education Conference in Hanoi; the establishment of an in-country bank account; and the smooth transition of the entire selection process to in-house management and control. Furthermore, for the first time, staff is able to report on the actual uses of the Professional Development Grants (PDGs) to both Fellows and Visiting Scholars. In addition, there has been an exciting precedent by a Vietnamese university to suggest providing financial support to VEF for VEF Fellows from that university.

Dr. McNamara concluded that the Board should be assured that staff is performing at top effectiveness in spite of the shadow of the proposed legislation.

Finance Committee Report – Isaac Silvera

Dr. Silvera noted that most of the Board and staff participated in the Finance Committee discussions. He stated that the financial information was available in the meeting materials and the finance details would be discussed later by Ms. Walbert.

Dr. McNamara elaborated on the previously mentioned offer by a Vietnamese university to support Fellows, clarifying that the Vietnamese National University in Hanoi (VNU Hanoi) had announced during the past summer that the university would be amenable to paying for one in every three Fellows who are selected from VNU to pursue studies in the United States. That person could be university staff or a student. She suggested that it might be appropriate to establish a separate account or fund to handle those monies so that the VNU candidates would not compete for the approved VEF funding for the Fellows selected in the established process. She added that the Ministry of Science and Technology had also indicated an interest in supporting its own staff to participate in VEF programs. Finally, a third potential source of external funding has emerged from a federal agency, the Office of Naval Research, since they have an established research program in Vietnam. However, there is no mechanism for that kind of transfer of funds, an important issue that must be addressed before proceeding with further discussion.

Sandy Dang, chair of the Fundraising Committee, briefly reported that the committee met on September 27 and agreed that the first step must be the development of a strategy, not only for how funds would be raised, but how they would be used for the benefit of the VEF programs. The committee would work on that in the near future.

Finally, Lana Walbert briefly discussed the ethics program, noting that she had again attended the annual Ethics Conference in September and that she would provide information and required forms to Board members in December. Action by the Board members would be due in January if any of them had changes to their prior documents

Alumni and VEF Alumni Conference

Ms. Sandarshi Gunawardena noted that the Third Annual VEF Alumni Conference had been held at Can Tho University on August 12 - 14, 2011. The next would be in Danang on August 10 - 12, 2012. Ms. Gunawardena briefly reviewed the status of the alumni, noting that of the 382 Fellows admitted to the program since its inception, 176 are now alumni (i.e. have successfully completed the primary objectives of their VEF Fellowship program and completed their degree programs). Of those, 116 have left the United States, and most have returned to Vietnam. Forty are in the United States completing Academic Training. Among the 32 Visiting Scholars who have participated in

the program, 29 are considered alumni. Finally, of the 17 U.S. Faculty Scholars there are 11 alumni.

Dr. McNamara noted that those Fellows in the United States, who have completed their degree requirements and are involved in Academic Training, are considered alumni. She asked the Board to consider a decision about whether a Fellow becomes an alumni when he or she obtains a degree, or whether the Fellow becomes an alumni only after he or she is no longer sponsored by VEF (i.e., when their name is removed from the DS2019 immigration document). Ms. Gunawardena added that there are no clear lines that demarcate when a Fellow is no longer associated with the program. Some who come for a master's program may choose to remain under the sponsorship of VEF to continue on to a Ph.D. program. Those Fellows receive limited support (e.g., to attend the VEF Annual Conference in the United States). One aspect of being defined as alumni, who have returned to Vietnam, involves support for attending the VEF Alumni Conference in Vietnam. Mr. Saxon observed that including in the alumni category those who have completed the program, but are working outside of Vietnam, dilutes the statistics related to alumni returning to Vietnam, which is the objective of the program. Dr. Petrochenkov suggested that including them in the category of Fellows doing Academic Training would resolve that issue.

Ms. Gunawardena pointed out that most of those, who return to Vietnam, enter either the private sector (41%) or academia (30%). A few go into the development sector, which is mainly government work, and a few start their own businesses. She added that many, who enter the corporate sector, go into the research area of the company they join, and there is significant cross-over of corporate individuals teaching part-time at universities and of academics involved with the corporate or private sector.

Ms. Gunawardena briefly discussed the 2011 VEF Alumni Conference that 61 alumni (of 105 in Vietnam) attended. The program included a Welcome Reception and a day at Can Tho University, where the alumni heard from a number of professors and visited with researchers at University labs and projects. The second day was devoted to outdoor activities that facilitated networking and teambuilding. On the final day the two-track agenda allowed participation in either a discussion of research and academic endeavors or entrepreneurship. The usual survey taken at the end of the conference revealed that the alumni most enjoyed the informal networking exchanges and the two-track program on the third day. The survey indicated that alumni would appreciate the opportunity to hold a conference at a corporate facility.

9th Annual VEF Fellows and Scholars Conference

Ms. Gunawardena announced that the 9th VEF Annual Conference would be held on January 3 - 5, 2012, at Louisiana State University in Shreveport, Louisiana. It is co-sponsored by the University's Health Sciences Center and 162 Fellows, Visiting Scholars, and U.S. Faculty Scholars (of over 200 now in the United States) have registered to

attend. Most who are not attending have valid reasons: on Academic Training and unable to get leave to attend, traveling back to Vietnam for the holiday break, family issues and so on. Dr. McNamara commented that initially the Annual Conference was mandatory for Fellows, but the previous Executive Director made it optional, and that decreased attendance. Dr. McNamara commented that the issue should be reviewed in light of the fact that the effort to put the conference on is the same, whether all of the Fellows or a smaller number attend, and the time and effort invested in this should be weighed against the number attending. Ms. Gunawardena added that in the early days of VEF, when the number was smaller and the VEF program was new, and all of the Fellows were required to attend, there was a need to develop a sense of camaraderie amongst the Fellows. However, the needs of the students and their level of preparation for return to Vietnam have changed with time, and hence the Annual Conference must be viewed with fresh insight to look at the goals and to assess if we are really making a significant impact through this conference. This is particularly important in light of poor attendance and also in light of the significant amount of money, time, and resources spent on this endeavor. There were suggestions that the conference might be held every other year, or the format could be changed to a weekend, two-day conference. Dr. McNamara noted that the 2013 conference will be held at Florida State University in Tallahassee, and there are discussions with Purdue University for the 2014 conference.

Programs in General

Ms. Dam described the Fellows' uses of the Professional Development Grants, which provide master's Fellows with \$1,000 a year for up to two years, and provide Ph.D. Fellows with \$1,000 for up to five years. The Hanoi staff surveyed the Fellows and found that almost 60% of the funds were being used to buy computer hardware and software; about 12% for conference support; almost 10% for books and journals, and about 6% each for expenses related to thesis preparation and visits to Vietnam for teaching, work, and research.

Dr. Petrochenkov announced that the previous publications that described the achievements of the Fellows and Scholars and the VEF program directory that listed Fellows, Visiting Scholars, and U.S. Faculty Scholars, has been consolidated into a new single publication, *2012 VEF Fellows, Scholars and Alumni: Achievements and Directory*. For the first time, it is available in a searchable format by name, institution, field of study, year, program and state. It will be available in hard copy at the Annual Conference, and thereafter it will be publicly available to anyone on the VEF web site. The new publication will be distributed by email attachment and by link to VEF contacts at Vietnamese corporations, educational institutions, and government agencies.

Dr. McNamara stated that a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for U.S. universities interested in joining the VEF Alliance had been developed to reflect university support expected for Visiting Scholars and U.S. Faculty Scholars and to delete references to the National Academies' role in the selection process. Dr. McNamara

noted that the number of Alliance universities had grown to 106. Finally, she explained that a new publication was in development. The working title is *Outcomes: The VEF Experience*, and it will be a narrative of what the Fellows and Scholars think they got out of the program and what they are doing as a result of their participation.

Capacity Building – Lynne McNamara

Dr. McNamara mentioned capacity building projects in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam. The first is the commitment to personnel and limited financial support of the Education Conference efforts. The Conference is expected to become a bi-annual program, with a working group meeting in the alternate years to look at policy and the agenda for the next conference. The second is a joint effort to develop a web presence, a web page tentatively entitled, *U.S.-Vietnam Academic Cooperation and Collaboration*, and it will provide a resource for Vietnamese and Americans to investigate such opportunities.

Operations Report – Lynne McNamara

Dr. McNamara stated that the most important development since the last meeting was the new VEF-related legislation that included wording that the VEF program would be subsumed by the Department of State. The latest understanding is that the original bill will not proceed, but the provisions germane to VEF could be appended to another type of bill, so it continues to be an issue that must be monitored. There was concern that such legislation could undermine future support for the VEF Fellows already in the program. Dr. McNamara commented that one version suggested that the annual \$5 million funding for VEF might have to be shared as part of the establishment of an American university program in Vietnam, although that project is apparently a private program so it is problematic just how federal funds could be used to that end. She added that letters had been sent to contacts on the Hill referring to the legislation and the related concerns. Dr. McNamara indicated that further communication might be appropriate, emphasizing the forward commitment VEF has made to its Fellows.

With regard to personnel, Dr. McNamara announced that Dr. Petrochenkov, formerly with the National Academies and associated with the selection program, had joined the staff of VEF as Program Officer. In Hanoi, a new Executive Assistant has been added to the staff, and policies have been developed for the Hanoi staff for comp time, flex time, and teleworking. The lead IT staff person will visit the Arlington office from February through April working half time on IT, and spending the rest of his time in an ESL training program. The outside communications consultant has remained on board, helping the U.S. staff with communications.

Ms. Gunawardena commented that the Interagency Working Group (IAWG) met on October 21 in Washington, D.C. Its purpose is to advise the President on improving

federally-sponsored international exchange programs. In economically troubled times, the IAWG looks at uses of funds and possibly duplicative or redundant programs.

Ms. Dam announced that press releases had been sent out on the new U.S. Faculty Scholars, the new Presidential appointments to the Board, and the selection of Mr. Fussner as Chairman of the Board. Dr. McNamara commented that she would arrange for mementos of nominal cost to be sent to former Board members as a token of appreciation for their service. Mr. Fussner endorsed the action.

Adjournment

Mr. Fussner invited final comments from Board members or staff. Dr. Maxner encouraged Board members, who might have contacts on the Hill, to communicate VEF's concerns about the possible pending legislation, including requesting a heads up if any new developments occur. He expressed concern that the legislation was introduced very quickly and that VEF had little information about it until it was nearly on the floor for discussion.

Future meetings in 2012 are scheduled on April 6, July 13, and November 16, and in 2013 on April 10.

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.