

**Vietnam Education Foundation**

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

**November 21, 2014**

**2111 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 700  
Arlington, VA 22201**

**List of Attendees:**

- **VEF Board members:**
  - **Dr. Edmund Malesky, Acting Chair**
  - **Dr. Quyen Chu**
  - **Ms. Erin Nephew (Treasury)**
  - **Mr. Tim Marshall (State)**
  - **Ms. Anhlan Nguyen, Board Chair (via telephone)**
  - **Dr. Kimoanh Nguyen-Lam (Education)**
- **VEF Staff:**
  - **Ms. Sandy Dang, Acting Executive Director**
  - **Ms. Dawn Bethelmy, Director of Finance and Accounting**
  - **Ms. Sandarshi Gunawardena, Senior Program Officer**
  - **Dr. Peggy Petrochenkov, Program Officer**
  - **Ms. Diana Martens, Program Associate**
- **Guests:**
  - **Ms. Lesly Wilson (GSA Legal Counsel)**

**Call to Order and Approval of Minutes, Dr. Edmund Malesky**

Dr. Malesky, as Acting Chair, called the meeting to order and invited approval of the minutes of the last Board meeting. On motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the July 18, 2014 meeting were unanimously approved.

He stated that the Board Chair, Ms. Anhlan Nguyen would discuss a draft of the document “VEF Board and Staff Communication Expectations”, which contained recommendations for how VEF Board meetings should be conducted. There was also a brief discussion of a draft of the document “Roles and Responsibilities of the VEF Board of Directors & Personnel”, which included specific responsibilities of staff, the Executive Director, and Board Members. The purpose of creating the guidelines was to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of VEF Board Meetings. In particular, the guidelines encouraged preplanning of the Board’s agenda, cooperative discussion, and assurance that all participants would have an opportunity to be heard. It was noted that complete and detailed recommendations requiring

Board action should be distributed to Board Members in advance of the meeting. Dr. Malesky suggested that a sentence be eliminated (under Difference of Opinion or Disagreement) so that the paragraph contains one sentence: *When a difference of opinion cannot be reconciled, it may be tabled until the Board Chair and Executive Director have time to review and make their recommendations.*

There was consensus that the guidelines were appropriate and should serve to improve the effectiveness of the Board, and that the description of roles and responsibilities was also appropriate. On motion duly made and seconded, the “VEF Board and Staff Communications Expectations” (as revised above) were unanimously approved. There was agreement that the “Roles and Responsibilities of VEF Board of Directors & Personnel” were appropriate and Board Members and staff were encouraged to review them and submit any suggestions for change to the Acting Executive Director.

#### **Acting Executive Director’s Top Line Report, Ms. Sandy Dang**

Ms. Dang expressed her appreciation for the support received during the first three months of her tenure as Acting Executive Director, noting that both U.S. and Hanoi office staff had been exceptionally helpful. She mentioned the excellent work of Hanoi staff in developing a translation of the Research Report. She stated that all required monthly and quarterly reports had been completed, as well as good progress on writing policies and procedures and addressing compliance issues. Ms. Dang commented that the U.S. office had been operating with five instead of six staff members, and everyone involved had been very helpful in picking up the slack caused by that personnel shortage.

A potentially difficult situation in the Hanoi office was sidestepped when two staff members received academic scholarships and resigned their positions. At the last meeting in July, the Board had approved reducing the Hanoi office staff by two.

Dr. Malesky commented that an issue had been the adjustment of the salary/remuneration of the country director, and Ms. Dang explained that with Phuong’s cooperation and with the new policies in place with regard to comp time, that matter had also been resolved. Through a series of monthly staff meetings and with informal discussions with individuals in Hanoi, most of the potentially contentious issues (like reduction in benefits, reducing telework time, etc.) had been resolved. Ms. Anhlan Nguyen commented that the Acting Executive Director should recognize the special cooperation demonstrated by Hanoi staff. Perhaps a note of appreciation would be appropriate. Dr. Malesky agreed, adding that similar appreciation should be noted for Ms. Dang’s willingness to step in and keep the VEF operation running as smoothly as possible.

#### **Selection Review Committee Report, Mr. Tim Marshall and Dr. Quyen Chu**

Mr. Marshall briefly outlined the options available to the Board with regard to budgeting for the next cohort of Fellows, Visiting Scholars and U.S. Faculty Scholars. He suggested that the Board consider several options. First, funding only three Visiting Scholars instead of four would allow us to remain within budget for Visiting Scholars. Second, if we are to fund all four top-ranked Visiting Scholars, it would require that one less Fellow could be supported to find the additional funds. Third, there are specific savings that could be achieved with regard to selecting the female Visiting Scholar, and there are some savings available because some Visiting Scholars require less funding than originally authorized as their period of program participation is less than 1 year. There was an extensive discussion about how to structure the selection process within the budgetary parameters.

The Board discussed several issues:

- The Board expressed concern that there are unknowns in the evaluation system and that validity studies were not available to them at this meeting. The long-term historical data is still incomplete, particularly in view of the long time required for Ph.D. degrees (usually 6 to 8 years by foreign nationals in STEM fields) since our first Fellows only began study in 2003. The drop-out rates were not provided to the SRC for this review cycle, and the Board would like to see more overarching information and statistics when carrying out the final selection of Fellows. Thirty-four Fellows with the highest average scores were proposed as Fellows with 30 alternates posed to replace any that drop out or do not get accepted into a quality graduate school program and four Visiting Scholars were tied for first place, although funding for four Scholars was not in the budget.

- The SRC and Board expressed concern about the lack of parity in the results between males and females. Dr. Chu, in particular, wished to see women pushed forward as a statement to counteract the privilege that men maintain in Vietnam. He also wondered whether there is a bias in the evaluation in favor of males. [For the record, the selection rate for females has always been higher for females than males in the reviews and the percentage of female Fellows is higher than the percentages in the same fields of specialization in the United States among female graduate students.] The question was raised whether women more frequently drop out of the program and out of graduate school.

There was a suggestion that the women with the highest scores replace the men at the top of the list of Fellows. However, a complication was the fact that the Fellows had already been informed of their award status, as has been done every year since 2005, in advance of Board approval to allow them to begin applying to U.S. graduate institutions. Their fellowships were finalized only in April, when they were accepted to a graduate school. Beginning two years ago, the SRC decided to let the Fellows call themselves “Fellows” and not “Nominees,” so that the universities looked at their applications more favorably. The staff suggested that approval from the SRC be requested immediately after the next review, so that there is no concern about the make-up of the Fellows award pool. Ultimately, the Board agreed that for the 2015 Fellows, the women with similar high scores should be moved to the top of the alternate list to enhance their opportunities for selection as a result of attrition (drop-outs). On motion duly made and seconded, that proposal was unanimously approved.

The remaining decision related to the budget limitation, and the option of selecting four Visiting Scholars and reducing the number of Fellows from 34 to 33; or selecting three Visiting Scholars and retaining all 34 Fellow candidates. On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously approved the former proposal – selecting four Visiting Scholars (two of whom had programs for less than one year and were therefore almost equivalent to 3 full awards) and dropping one Fellow candidate (not awarding another Fellowship when the next Fellow withdraws from the program).

#### **Update on Selection of Permanent Executive Director, Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam**

The Board met in executive session for the discussion of the status of the selection of a permanent Executive Director. Staff left the room and the recording device was turned off. At the end of the off-the-record discussion, staff returned and Dr. KimOahn Nguyen-Lam explained that the first level of screening candidates was completed on November 12. The Board met informally on November

20 to conduct the second level of screening and to discuss candidate qualifications. In the near future there will be telephone interviews and the final slate of candidates will be selected. The final slate of candidates will be invited to visit the Washington office for a face-to-face interview. Board Members will attend, and travel for three Board Members who do not live in the Washington area must be approved by an e-mail resolution and vote.

#### **Closure Plan, Ms. Sandarshi Gunawardena**

Ms. Gunawardena stated that two issues/principles related to closure had been discussed by the Board at the July board meeting and related motions approved. A further analysis was done on the implications of these principles to program participants in each cohort, and revealed an unprecedented number of potential departures; as program participants who would likely need to/choose to transition to the university sponsorship, to meet our closure plans. Dr. Malesky explained that VEF is responsible for previously agreed-upon terms to provide Fellows with a return ticket to Vietnam. That would continue to be a VEF responsibility if the Fellow opts to complete his or her academic program under the aegis of VEF and the J visa provided by VEF. However, if the Fellow decides to transition to the university sponsorship, that return trip obligation devolves back to the Fellow and VEF would no longer be responsible for paying for the Fellow's return ticket back to Vietnam. Further, Dr. Malesky explained that this policy may result in pushback from some Fellows, who may feel that VEF has reneged on something promised earlier. He stated that the Board should agree on a firm policy that all inquiries related to this policy be directed only to Ms. Gunawardena, and that no other staff or Board member should respond to any questions regarding the policy. Ms. Gunawardena commented that two current VEF policies would be affected by this change – the program extension policy and the academic training policy.

There was a brief discussion about the technical aspects of transitioning from the VEF J visa to a university J visa. Ms. Wilson noted that the changes should be acknowledged by the Fellows in writing, since the changes are significant.

#### **External Opportunities, Ms. Sandy Dang**

Ms. Dang briefly discussed the strategic plan, noting that staff would develop a detailed plan taking VEF to 2018. The plan would be distributed to Board members when completed. She also discussed the closure of the Hanoi office and the fact that staff there had requested a six-month notice of intent in order to make their own transition plans. She noted there were a number of issues to address, including the disposition/disposal of IT equipment, software and stored data, which requires special handling (including the need to return certain IT items to the U.S. for destruction). VEF must also handle the termination of various legal contracts, licenses, leases, etc. Some of the IT items have already been hand-carried by U.S. staff from Hanoi to Washington.

Ms. Dang explained that program activities will continue past 2016, but since there will be no additional grants and programs in Vietnam, the need for Hanoi staff will be dramatically reduced. Ms. Bethelmy commented that there should be minimal expenses in Vietnam after September 2016, when the office lease, etc. end. There may be short-term extensions of some of those agreements to meet the final closure requirement in Vietnam. She explained that she would develop a budget projection for FY16 for review at the April Board meeting, and then develop the final financial projections for FY '17 and FY'18.

Ms. Dang discussed legacy issues, and the legal implications, including the needs of alumni. Ms. Wilson commented that the legislation dictates that all official VEF activities cease in 2018. Ms. Gunawardena added that the embassy had advised staff there should be no significant departure ceremony, since it may be perceived as a termination of educational exchange activities supported by the U.S. government; which is contrary to the fact, and the U.S. government 's engagement in international education activities between the U.S. and Vietnam will continue. For example, VEF alumni could join the Department of State Alumni Network. There was a brief discussion about the opportunities and limitations for developing legacy support for VEF alumni. There was a final comment that the Vietnamese government has indicated a willingness to assume leadership and independently build on the structure that VEF has created.

#### **Future Board Meeting Dates**

The Board is scheduled to meet on the following Fridays in 2015 – April 10, July 17 and November 20.

There being no further business for the Board, the meeting was adjourned.