

Vietnam Education Foundation

**Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors
July 17, 2015**

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

(PENDING ON BOARD APPROVAL AT THE NOVEMBER 2015 BOARD MEETING)

List of Attendees:

- **VEF Board members:**
 - **Dr. Edmund Malesky, Chair**
 - **Dan Greenland (Treasury)**
 - **Mr. Tim Marshall, (State)**
 - **Ms. Anhlan Nguyen Nguyen (Board Chair)**
 - **Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam (Education)**
- **VEF Staff:**
 - **Ms. Sandy Dang, Executive Director**
 - **Ms. Helen Tran, Director of Finance and Accounting**
 - **Ms. Sandarshi Gunawardena, Senior Program Officer**
 - **Dr. Peggy Petrochenkov, Program Officer**
 - **Ms. Diana Martens, Program Associate**
- **Guests:**
 - **Mr. Seth Greenfield (GSA Legal Counsel)**

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Ms. Anhlan Nguyen called the meeting to order, noting that Dr. Quyen Chu's board term had recently ended. She recognized his valuable contribution to the board, including his activities on the Selection Review Committee (SRC). She briefly reviewed the agenda – a discussion of the interview mission in August; a report on a recent June trip to Vietnam by board members; a look at revising the bylaws to accommodate the smaller number of board members, which affects the quorum requirement; and a discussion of the final recognition that VEF deserves as it closes.

She invited approval of the minutes of the April 10, 2015 meeting and, on motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Regarding the recent trip to Vietnam, Ms. Anhlan Nguyen emphasized the importance of expending energy to inform the interested public of the accomplishments of VEF. She commended Sandarshi Gunawardena and Peggy Petrochenkov and the Hanoi staff for outstanding efforts to create a brochure in a short timeframe to feature a few success stories of alumni accomplishments. A number of VEF alumni were asked to contribute a brief testimonial about their achievements. In addition, Ms. Anhlan Nguyen, with Ms. Dang, met with congressional supporters, including Senator Vitter of Louisiana, who was impressed with the success stories. There was also a meeting with Senator Blumenthal (Conn.), who offered to sponsor a reception on the Hill.

Executive Director's Top Line Report, Sandy Dang

Ms. Dang reported that the Arlington office staff had been effective in managing a very heavy workload with the additional challenge of having staff members legitimately absent for an extended period of time. She added that it was also a challenge for such a small agency to maintain compliance with various federal requirements, as well as maintain a busy schedule that included meetings with the three potential IT vendors recommended by GSA, revising the 20th anniversary video (Hanoi staff), preparation for the next annual audit, planning a reception at the U.S. ambassador's residence in Vietnam, and working with alumni to obtain material for the brochure. She concluded with an acknowledgement of the Arlington staff for their efforts.

Review VEF By-Laws

Ms. Anhlan Nguyen turned to a review of the by-laws, which call for six presidential appointees and three cabinet level representatives. Dr. Malesky added that the by-laws also specified that three of the presidential appointees would be drawn from academia. Ms. Anhlan Nguyen commented that the number of presidential appointees had been reduced to two, and the three cabinet level representatives bring the total board membership to five, which is not in compliance with the by-laws. Mr. Greenfeld noted that the membership requirements are in the statute, as well as in the by-laws, which makes amending the by-laws alone problematic. The legislation would have to be revised. Concerning the quorum, he added that there is no specific definition of quorum in the by-laws, so revising the definition of a quorum should be less difficult. Ms. Anhlan Nguyen stated that the White House had indicated that there would be no new board members nominated.

Debrief of June Mission

The June mission to Vietnam included Ms. Anhlan Nguyen, Mr. Tim Marshall, Ms. Dang, and Ms. Gunawardena. Mr. Marshall expressed the opinion that the trip was worthwhile. He commented that the opportunity to meet with the Hanoi staff was rewarding, and that the several meetings that were scheduled included participants who were genuinely interested in getting updated on VEF activities. It was also valuable to meet several alumni there, and to participate in the PDO from the opening welcome to the closing ceremony.

Ms. Gunawardena described the rewarding and challenging outdoor learning experiences of the PDO program, in which the students participated.

Ms. Anhlan Nguyen expressed the hope that one of the legacies of VEF could be the many valuable relationships developed through the VEF programs and through participation in programs such as the PDO. She added that the design of the brochure includes an illustration of a bridge that conveys that concept.

Ms. Gunawardena related some of the comments made by the new cohort of students from a survey completed at the end of the PDO. The remarks conveyed the importance of the exercises and activities in building a sense of teamwork, self-confidence, and being able to share experiences with others about what life in the U.S. is like. Participants gained an assurance that they can function successfully in the new environment and they felt more prepared for what to expect in the U.S. after the PDO.

Selection Review Committee, Tim Marshall, Chair

Mr. Marshall observed that the method for reporting the number of graduates, those who are still in academic training, and those who have returned to Vietnam, can lead to some confusion. He suggested that reporting the number who have “completed the program” would be more accurate. Dr. Malesky commented that the number of alumni no longer in Vietnam is higher than it should be and an issue that should be addressed; that it is incumbent on VEF to encourage its fellows to return to and stay in Vietnam after completing the VEF program.

Dr. Petrochenkov reviewed the upcoming interview mission, which will look at 118 qualified applicants, 14 Visiting Scholar applicants. It results in a heavy workload for the interviewers. Ms. Dang noted that there were ten interviewers, six of whom were female. The caliber of the interviewers is excellent, two of whom are members of the National Academies.

Mr. Marshall raised the issue of when a student in Ph.D. program for whatever reason (usually academic issues) must change to a master’s program. Ms. Gunawardena explained that, under J immigration regulations reverse-matriculation is not permitted. If a student has to move from a Ph.D. degree to a master’s degree (which typically occurs due to academic reasons and sometimes a personal choice) they have to either leave country and return on a new J-1 for the master’s degree or most often (since it occurs without much advance notice), VEF has to do an immigration withdrawal, which allows only for a 15-day grace period for the student to leave the U.S. She said it is a cumbersome and labor-intensive process, to carefully monitor these cases of reverse-matriculation. She added that last year eleven such situations existed and there are six in the works at present for this year.

Ms. Gunawardena explained that there are institutions that offer programs in which a student may initially pursue a master’s degree and then switch to a Ph.D. program. However, there are institutions that do not offer that option and require that a student choose at the outset a Ph.D. or master’s program. The first program, called a M.S./Ph.D. program, is much

easier to manage in terms of making that change. The other program -- starting in a Ph.D. program and then trying to reverse matriculate to a master's program -- is much more problematic. Starting in a Ph.D. program in which there is no option to obtain a master's degree is more complicated.

Dr. Malesky summarized the recommendation to address this issue, that at the interview mission the high risk fields are identified -- those fields that have been shown to present completion issues as evidenced by an historically high rate of reverse-matriculation requests. If an applicant desires to pursue a Ph.D. in one of those fields, the interviewer will indicate that he or she feels the applicant has the exceptional abilities required to be successful. The Board endorsed that proposal by consensus.

Programs and Activities -- VEF Fellowship Program

Ms. Gunawardena reported that there are 279 fellows in the U.S., 185 of whom are in academic programs. An additional 27 new fellows will begin in the fall. Fifty-four fellows are pursuing post-completion Academic Training programs. She noted that the visa transfer program was beginning to be active, with 13 fellows having applied for transfer or having been transferred from VEF J status to a university program. That number will significantly increase by August of next year. There is an active effort to remain associated with the fellows who have transferred.

It was noted that no new fellowships will be awarded after 2016, including the U.S. Faculty Scholars. Dr. Malesky suggested that a joint research project should be feasible between a U.S. institution and a VEF alumnus, as long as the project is carried out in Vietnam. Dr. Malesky also suggested that it might be viable to request an extension of the Faculty Scholar program as a final VEF program, and award grants through that mechanism.

Annual Conference, Spring 2016

Ms. Dang commented that it would be impractical to consider an annual conference in 2015 because of the time constraints. However, an annual conference in 2016 could be properly planned. There was a brief discussion of possible formats, as well as potential arrangements that could be made to cooperate with a local university that might have meeting space available. Concerning the cost, Ms. Anhlan Nguyen commented that the IT budget estimate has been considerably reduced such that some of that savings could be redirected to the conference.

Ms. Anhlan Nguyen also suggested that VEF could contact participants in the U.S. Faculty Scholars program, sending them a letter of appreciation and the new brochure. That might engender interest in participating in the conference. Mr. Marshall suggested that a similar effort might be made to re-engage past board members or others who have been significantly involved in VEF in the past. Dr. Malesky offered a scenario: Select perhaps ten projects being run by alumni or fellows, help them develop professional presentations about

the projects , include the presentation in the conference agenda, and to make it even more impactful arrange for a simulcast so that alumni and others in Vietnam could remotely attend that session. Ms. Gunawardena offered a caution that the time frame may be too short for a very ambitious program idea. The discussion included a suggestion that funding could be from outside sources, although solicitation of such funding would have to be carefully planned since it could be outside the authority of federal employees. The idea of having volunteer interns was mentioned. Ms. Anhlan Nguyen closed the discussion, noting that Dr. Malesky would articulate the action item in writing on his suggestion, which will be sent to all board members.

Closure of Hanoi Office

Ms. Dang stated that the Hanoi office staff had been alerted to the closure process and had agreed to help. The actions required have been identified, including the legal requirements. MOET must provide certain documents, signatures and endorsements. Concerning the internal procedures, Ms. Dang stated that she and Dr. Petrochenkov would spend time during the August mission developing a basic inventory and identifying items that must be saved, scanned, destroyed and so on, including the physical assets such as furniture. Staff contracts will be terminated in March and June, and the Hanoi office should be effectively closed by June 2016 and officially closed by September 30, 2016. There may be a person to represent VEF after that, although there would be no office space and no license for VEF to conduct business.

There being no further business, Ms. Anhlan Nguyen invited a motion to adjourn. On motion duly made and seconded, the board unanimously approved adjournment.

