

Vietnam Education Foundation

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

November 20, 2015

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

List of Attendees:

- **VEF Board members:**
 - **Dr. Anhlan Nguyen, Chair, VEF Board of Directors**
 - **Mr. Dan Greenland (Treasury)**
 - **Dr. Edmund Malesky, Chair, Finance Committee**
 - **Mr. Tim Marshall, (Chair, Selection and Review Committee, State)**
 - **Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam (Education)**
- **VEF Staff:**
 - **Ms. Sandy Dang, Executive Director**
 - **Ms. Sandarshi Gunawardena, Senior Program Officer**
 - **Dr. Peggy Petrochenkov, Program Officer**
- **Guests:**
 - **Mr. Seth Greenfeld (GSA Legal Counsel)**

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Dr. Anhlan Nguyen called the meeting to order, briefly reviewed the meeting agenda, and called for approval of the minutes of the last board meeting. On motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the July 17, 2015 meeting were unanimously approved.

Executive Director's Report

Ms. Sandy Dang reported that the August 2015 interview mission was successful. In addition, the Hanoi office has responded to personnel changes and will hire an administrative assistant to support day-to-day management processes. In the U.S. office, Ms. Singshinsuk, from Chortek, has been of great support since the departure of the Director of Finance and Accounting (DFA), but she is a consultant and cannot continue in a full time role. However, Ms. Dang reported that a candidate for permanent DFA has accepted an offer to assume the position so Ms. Singshinsuk will reduce the number of consulting hours to VEF starting in January 2016.

Ms. Dang announced that she was planning to visit Vietnam in late November to attend a conference (Joint Committee Meeting) that is sponsored by the Ministry of Science and Technology and the U.S. State Department in Ho Chi Minh City in December 2015. Ms. Dang was going to invite several VEF alumni to participate on a few panels. In addition, she planned to work with Hanoi staff on the office closure.

Board Transition Plan

Dr. Nguyen reminded the board that the terms of the current presidential appointees will end on April 17, 2016, and after meeting with White House, GSA and OMB, it appears there is no support for extending these appointments. Dr. Nguyen stated that the present plan is that she and Dr. Malesky will tender their resignations, after which the only board members would be those representing the Secretaries of State, Education and Treasury. Mr. Greenfeld commented that he had submitted draft bylaw revisions that would establish a committee that would be vested with the powers of the board. He observed that the current bylaws allow board members to remain on the board after their terms expire until replacement members are appointed by the White House. He felt that the White House would not be concerned about those extensions. Mr. Greenfeld also noted that there was precedent in several other small USG agencies such that creating a committee to be responsible for agency operations would be valid. Dr. Nguyen agreed that board members could continue to serve until their replacements were approved, but reiterated that there does not appear to be any intention of appointing replacements.

Dr. Nguyen commented that her preference was to take action on the matter at the April 2016 meeting, and to create the committee Mr. Greenfeld described, consisting of the three Executive Department representatives. Mr. Marshall felt that each of the federal representatives should check with their individual agency to see if there are any issues with this new board configuration.

Dr. Malesky commented that there is a fiduciary responsibility to being on the board, and that official sanction for individuals to continue serving on the board is critical for their legal liability protection. He felt there are three options: 1) that the three federal representatives serve on the committee established by the bylaws revision; 2) that the two presidential appointees receive official sanction (an extension of their present appointments to continue to serve until VEF closes); or 3) that the presidential appointees submit resignations and terminate their official association with VEF on April 17, 2016. The board decided to look into the matter further and discuss at the April board meeting.

Selection Review Committee Report

Mr. Marshall reported that the Selection Review Committee (SRC) had received the recommendations from the interview mission committee for the 2016 fellows and visiting scholars. The SRC supported recommendations and forwarded them to the full board, which

approved the selections. Dr. Petrochenkov added that the August 2016 Interview Mission had a diverse group of professors who served as interviewers. Out of ten interviewers, six of them are women. In addition, we had three minority out of ten interviewers.

Dr. Petrochenkov announced that the U.S. Faculty Scholars selection process was currently under way. There are currently fewer candidates this year, perhaps because the reduced budget for advertising; but usually the largest number of applications arrive in the last five days of the eligibility period. She added that there are four slots available. That said, current budgetary limitations may be less constraining in the spring, and the possibility of adding a fifth individual could be considered at the April board meeting. Ms. Gunawardena noted that the funding allocated for fellows is usually not fully expended. Mr. Greenfeld commented that the legislation specifically bars awarding any new fellowship or extending any existing fellowship after September 30, 2016 -- therefore, this cohort would be the last one funded.

Visa Transfer Process

Ms. Gunawardena stated that the visa transfer program is going well. Almost everyone involved is positive about the transfer. There have been a few procedural problems that required attention, e.g. a few students left the country without advising VEF, and returned after obtaining J visas. Since it is irregular to have two current visas of different types at the same time those situations had to be addressed, Ms. Gunawardena commented that host institutions sometimes fail to comply with VEF policies, one of which is to inform VEF of any action taken with regard to visa status. It is not a significant issue at this time since only three violations have occurred, but host institutions should advise VEF when a visa is going to be issued.

Ms. Gunawardena reported there are still about 200 fellows in the pipeline that will require transfer services, and that VEF has hired a part-time immigration advisor as a contractor., The contractor is performing mainly administrative services, little of which requires contact with the fellows, and most of which can be done remotely. Ms. Gunawardena commented that 170 fellows are on J sponsorship at U.S. universities, and about 50 are on academic training still under VEF sponsorship. There will also be about 30 students who transfer before the annual conference in March 2016. Dr. Malesky expressed the opinion that all that really changes is immigration status, and that they should be invited to attend the annual conference. The board concurred that the transferred students should be able to attend the conference.

Closure of the Hanoi Office

Dr. Nguyen commented that the U.S. embassy has indicated a willingness to help with the closure of the VEF Hanoi office that is scheduled for September 2016. Ms. Dang confirmed the good relationship VEF has with the embassy, recalling the August reception that was held at the Ambassador's residence. She added that she had received a list of closure procedures from

Hanoi staff. The board agreed that VEF should abide by the requirements of both Vietnam and the U.S. government in the closure process.

Supporting VEF Alumni in Vietnam

Dr. Nguyen commented that in June 2015 she and Mr. Marshall met with VEF alumni in both Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi and encouraged them to maintain an alumni community in country. The alumni had held a conference at which they discussed three ongoing programs. The first program is mentoring, which has been in place for a while. The second is to support the on-going activities of the *Vietnam Journal of Science*, which is very much like the peer-reviewed journals in the U.S. The journal, which focuses on research being conducted by VEF fellows and alumni, just published its third issue. Finally, the newest program is in the proposal stage, but it will center on carrying on the VEF tradition of supporting Vietnamese to pursue higher degrees. Dr. Nguyen suggested that if there is a way to support this effort with funding within VEF guidelines, it would be appropriate. She added that her report was for information, not development of an action item. Ms. Gunawardena commented that the Vietnam Education Foundation Fellows Association (VEFFA) was created with VEF support, and the alumni involved created a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization as a vehicle for managing the objectives of the VEFFA. Although not all alumni are involved, it has proven to be an effective organization.

Mr. Marshall brought up two points – that any VEF support should be done in a manner that is not construed as supporting a continuation of VEF in its current form, and that the board should look at avenues for funding that would be acceptable. Dr. Nguyen concluded the discussion by noting that the alumni have a committed pool of talent and a preliminary roadmap, and it is worth discussing at some point whether VEF can support them in some acceptable way.

Budget Projections for FY 2017 and FY 2018

Mr. Greenfield reviewed the VEF legislation, noting that VEF receives \$5 million a year to run its operations, and that any monies in excess of that (during FY 2017 through FY 2018) shall be used to support ‘a not-for-profit academic institution in Vietnam’. There was a brief discussion about the disposition of the funding. Dr. Malesky interpreted the statute to read that the \$5 million would continue through 2018. Mr. Greenland agreed, but noted that there would have to be a proposal submitted to OMB on the way VEF would spend the funding. He felt that, considering the process of closure that shrinks VEF’s infrastructure, the money would have to be very well spent, or distributed in a way that would be supported by OMB.

Mr. Marshall suggested an interagency transfer might be an option if projects within the VEF mission statement could be identified. Dr. Malesky observed that the Fulbright University, Vietnam (FUV) might be one avenue to endow chairs (professorships) or establish scholarships in the STEMM fields. The scholarships also could be reserved for under-represented groups. Finally, he suggested providing a grant fund for FUV professors to support their research. He felt it is appropriate to spend uncommitted funds to promote science in Vietnam if possible.

Dr. Malesky stated that his goal was to encourage Vietnamese who had completed the VEF experience to use their experience in ways that aligns with VEF mission.

Mr. Greenland stated that a significant hurdle in any of these proposals will be gaining OMB approval, which will take a well-constructed proposal. He suggested, as an action item, to invite board members to submit ideas, supported by a rationale that fits the VEF mission and conforms to the legislation. Then two or three of those proposals could be presented to OMB.

There was an in-depth discussion about how best to deploy the any remaining funding, including considerations of the missions of the candidate institutions, the style of the contribution, and whether there is an exchange component to the recipient institution's mission (which is true for VEF). Noting that there would be more information about availability of funding at the April meeting, the point was made that it's only necessary to obligate the funds by September 30, 2016 (i.e. can be expended after that date).

The process of soliciting and awarding the funds was also discussed, including either putting out an RFP for all comers, for a limited number of preselected institutions, or for a sole source. Dr. Malesky felt this could work for faculty scholars, especially if the grant was paired with a Vietnamese scholar as a joint project. Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam suggested a proposal that would require minimal funding, followed by multiple years when the real work would be done and which would require an allocation of significantly more money.

Dr. Malesky asked if Dr. Petrochenkov could write such a proposal. She stated that she could and asked for clarification about the requirement to include a collaborating former VEF fellow. Dr. Nguyen suggested that the wording should indicate a preference for such a person rather than a firm requirement. She also suggested that the RFP could be sent to VEF alumni who might have contacts in the U.S. who might be interested in a grant. Dr. Nguyen-Lam recommended a multi-year proposal, perhaps for three years. Concerning whether an institution would have to be involved, Dr. Malesky commented that, if the scholar is well qualified, there would be no need to add that restriction, unless infrastructure was needed and a local institution could provide it.

Dr. Nguyen-Lam suggested that the kinds of activities that would be appropriate to a partnership between a U.S. Scholar and VEF alumni could include joint research, joint program development, and curriculum course development. Dr. Nguyen closed the discussion by stating that Dr. Petrochenkov would write the RFP for a grant to be awarded and funded in 2016, writing the RFP in such a way that multiple years could be built into the grant.

Mr. Greenland offered the caveat that the board should remember that, in the timeframe involved, the board could lose the two presidential appointees, and staff would be reduced. Dr. Malesky brought up the option of an RFP for a pilot project which, if successful, could lead to an RFP for a larger project.

Third Party Assessment

The board discussed a proposal to develop an historical evaluation that would be appended to the final annual reports, probably in 2018. It would be an impact analysis to articulate the positive outcomes of VEF since it began. There were comments that several companies produce this kind of analysis. Dr. Nguyen stated that the board need not discuss the proposal in depth at this meeting, but it would be helpful to get a sense of the board's interest in the project. There was a comment that such projects can be costly.

Dr. Malesky expressed reservations about pursuing the project because he felt there should be a counterfactual aspect to the report, which would be an assessment of the success of the VEF fellows who complete the program, as well as an evaluation of applicants who were not selected. He felt such a project should have been planned from the beginning of VEF so that sufficient data could have been collected over the years to provide valid information. Dr. Malesky was also concerned that the expenditure could be significant, and the final product might be unsatisfactory.

Annual Conference 2016

Ms. Dang distributed a proposed draft agenda for the annual conference. She stated that the board should consider agreement on an overall goal of the conference, as well as a conference theme. Mr. Greenland suggested that the conference should highlight the overall achievements of VEF, including recognition of the successes of the students and scholars.

Dr. Nguyen commented that there should be some time in the program for VEFFA and the alumni network to share their programs with the general conference audience. Ms. Dang reported that the VEFFA representatives had contacted her to let her know that VEFFA would like to use the conference as an opportunity to issue a call for papers. VEFFA indicated they would be very active in the conference, including a session during which VEF alumni could share their experiences.

Dr. Malesky noted the agenda item on the first day when fellows and scholars would speak briefly about their achievements. He stressed that the subject matter should be diverse – for example, one person might speak about an inspiring experience, another about an entrepreneurial venture, and another about a science project. Finally, he felt that professionally prepared posters and graphics would dramatically improve the impact of the presentations.

Dr. Nguyen suggested that an informal dialog between the fellows and the full board would be an interesting. Dr. Malesky made several comments about the opening reception including that the event could be improved from being a simple display of posters by having an MC talk about the history of VEF and what is happening now. Dr. Nguyen suggested hiring an event coordinator to keep the program on track.

Publication of Public Relations Materials

Ms. Dang commented that there are funds in the current budget to print materials to demonstrate the success of VEF. The individual success stories collected by Dr. Petrochenkov could be published in booklet form, possibly an eight-page format with photographs. Dr. Nguyen-Lam suggested that the pages could be printed as posters as well. There was a comment that the enlargements of the booklet pages might engender greater interest than the booklets. Mr. Marshall encouraged focusing on the publications that need to be completed before March 2016 annual conference. The board briefly discussed overall conference theme and recommended that the words “impact”, and “now and beyond” should be considered.

Adjournment

Dr. Nguyen reminded the board of the meeting dates in 2016: April 8, July 29, and December 9. The meeting was then adjourned.