

**Minutes of the Virginia Museum of Natural History University Partnerships *ad hoc*  
committee meeting  
Jan. 7, 2021**

Present at the online meeting were Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. Carole Nash, Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Katherine O'Neill, Dr. DB Poli, Dr. Joe Keiper, Dr. Adam Pritchard, Dr. Kal Ivanov, Christy Deatherage, Zach Ryder, and Ben Williams

- Dr. Joe Keiper called the meeting to order.
- Dr. Joe Keiper explained to the committee that museum staff has been discussing strategic options for future partnerships with staff at Virginia colleges and universities who are applying for National Science Foundation (NSF) grants. The concept had arisen of using VMNH as a mechanism to provide competitive broader impact statements for NSF grants. One idea had been to form a partnership with a university and receive a grant to create an exhibit for the museum's special exhibit hall (possible a traveling exhibit to generate further funds). VMNH would provide text for the proposal, create a budget, provide marketing, and provide installation. Another avenue, Dr. Keiper said, would be to seek a grant partnership for educational outreach and programming that would be provided to schools free of charge. The question, Dr. Keiper said, is how to connect with these university partners? He then opened the floor to the ad hoc committee.
- Dr. Carole Nash asked why the grants should be restricted to NSF grants, suggesting that VMNH could generate more interest by opening the program to all sorts of grants. Dr. Joe Keiper said VMNH would be happy to participate with alternate funding sources in addition to NSF grants.
- Dr. Carole Nash asked if VMNH should be specific about the priorities of these partnerships, as there may be university faculty members who wish to participate but have projects that may not align with VMNH's interests. Additionally, Dr. Nash suggested that seeking grants for digital exhibits/programs rather than in-person could open up new avenues for VMNH.
- Dr. Katherine O'Neill agreed that an online focus would be a positive. In her experience with broader impact statements, she said, there is an increasing focus on online, digital content, especially considering the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- Dr. DB Poli seconded the idea that the programs should not be limited to NSF grants. She added that the VMNH website is heavily focused on K-12 education and some researchers/faculty members may not be as interested in generating offerings for K-12. Dr. Poli also said that VMNH should not rely on creating a pamphlet outlining the partnership program and simply sending it to potential partners; instead, a more focused, in-person approach would be preferable. Additionally, Dr. Poli said that it would be beneficial to generate ideas for exhibits that could be installed at partner institutions rather than at VMNH.

- Dr. Art Evans said that in his experience, partnerships develop organically through individual relationships, although it's still good to have materials ready to share. Dr. Evans agreed that putting together a boilerplate pamphlet and sending it to potential partners would probably not work as well as one-on-one communication.
- Dr. Carole Nash suggested offering the museum's *Jeffersoniana* publication series as a carrot to potential partners, as many faculty partners might be interested in having a publication to share their work. Dr. Joe Keiper agreed that additional grant funding could be a boon to the museum's publication series.
- Dr. Katherine O'Neill said that VMNH should target grant offices at different universities and also target regional science conferences. Dr. Tom Benzing agreed with these points, particularly making sure grant offices are made aware of these potential partnerships.
- Dr. Adam Pritchard said that due to the smaller size of the museum, VMNH can offer integrative internship and traineeship programs that larger museums simply cannot. The ability to offer internships that touch on multiple different disciplines could be very attractive to partners, he said.
- Dr. Joe Keiper asked Dr. Tom Benzing to appoint a chair of the ad hoc committee. In the meantime, he said, VMNH staff would circulate the minutes of the meeting, discuss the main points, generate a road map, and share it at the next board meeting.
- In the interim, Dr. Art Evans said, staff should attempt to generate a list of potential partners.
- Dr. Joe Keiper adjourned the meeting.

NOTE: As of February 2021, VMNH is partnering with multiple universities, and targets submission of a grant proposal to NSF in March.