



**REGIONAL ARTS
COMMISSION**
OF ST. LOUIS

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**Regional Arts Commission
Executive Committee Minutes
Thursday, January 22, 2026 via ZOOM
8:30 a.m.**

Call to Order & Committee Members in Attendance

Chair Ochoa called the January 22, 2026 meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. and asked Sutherlin to conduct the Committee roll call.

Committee Members in Attendance

Tino Ochoa, Chair; Sam Fiorello, Vice Chair; John Russell, Treasurer; Jerry Gennaria, Member-at-Large; Robert Arbuthnot (8:50a) Member-at-Large

Yea – Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Gennaria, Arbuthnot

Nay – none

Abstain - none

Absent

Rhonda Carter-Adams, Secretary

Staff Attendees

Vanessa Cooksey, Lea Sutherlin

Approval of Minutes

Ochoa called for a motion to approve the minutes from the September 3, 2025, Executive Committee meeting.

Motion made by Russell, seconded by Fiorello and unanimously carried to approve the Executive Committee minutes – September 3, 2025. Votes were as follows:

Yea – Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Gennaria, Arbuthnot

Nay – none

Abstain - none

Ochoa called for the following reports.

Government & Legal Affairs Update (Chair Ochoa & Cooksey)

Ochoa noted that the government and legal affairs update would be held for a later meeting.





FY 2026 Work Plan (Cooksey)

Cooksey shared the following: (1) since 2021, she [Cooksey] has developed and presented an annual fiscal year work plan that guides RAC's team's efforts, aligning with an evolving strategic plan, now called a strategic roadmap (2) her review of the previous year's work plan to identify unfinished tasks, incorporate them, and then build new goals based on input from commission meetings, team discussions, and upcoming priorities; (3) the process has been refined through staff collaboration, and the plan is submitted to the Executive Committee for approval; (4) the work plan directly influences staff bonuses and additional compensation, which are contingent upon achieving its objectives; and (5) she ensures that all related details are properly documented in our minutes and governance processes.

Cooksey presented RAC's FY 2026 Work Plan, included in the packet for this meeting, as follows: (1) emphasized aiming for fewer, more measurable deliverables while maintaining flexibility for unexpected issues; (2) the plan is organized into three categories: We Invest [funding and grants], We Amplify [public engagement, website, reputation, artist connections], and We Lead [public communication, government relations, arts-health initiatives, research, and organizational management]; (3) key deliverables include [a] distributing \$5.3 million in grants, [b] completing the Artist Investment Pilot, [c] wrapping up ARPA funds, [d] relaunching and upgrading the website, [e] expanding engagement with civic and arts sectors, [f] developing a new data-driven grant process, and [g] promoting arts as a civic asset; and (4) Administrative deliverables involve [a] strengthening policies, [b] financial stewardship, [c] data management, and [d] governance processes. Cooksey then emphasized that the work plan is about impactful, strategic work, not just more tasks, with ongoing efforts to communicate the value of arts and culture and prepare for upcoming research.

Ochoa asked Cooksey when she expects to finalize the items highlighted in yellow.

Cooksey responded that her goal is to complete those items within the next 30 days, ideally before the first full commission meeting, so she can include updates in her president's report for the March meeting, keeping all commissioners informed. Cooksey added that she invites any additional questions or feedback, noting that she incorporates insights from previous performance reviews.

Ochoa expressed appreciation for the emphasis on reassessment and organizational evolution, and recognized Cooksey's approach to adapting the work plan to staff changes and broader environmental factors.

Russell commented that the plan appears very comprehensive.

Ochoa called for a motion to approve the FY 2026 Work Plan.

Motion made by Fiorello, seconded by Russell and unanimously carried to approve the FY 2026 Work Plan. Votes were as follows:

Yea – Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Gennaria, Arbuthnot

Nay – none





Abstain - none

Cooksey asked Gennaria (as the 2025 chair) to share the President-CEO's compensation and bonus plan, which was developed in the executive committee last year. Cooksey then discussed the importance of formalizing the plan, and emphasized the following: (1) the need for a formal vote to ensure compliance, especially given current open records requests; (2) currently, only her role has an official bonus structure, while other staff receive recognition like holiday gifts; and (3) plans to establish individual bonus plans linked to the work plan by 2027 and is working on creating a performance management process that is efficient and captures each team member's contributions.

Ochoa called for a motion to approve RAC's CEO Compensation Plan 2025-2027.

Motion made by Fiorello, seconded by Russell and unanimously carried to approve RAC's CEO Compensation Plan 2025-2027. Votes were as follows:

Yea – Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Gennaria, Arbuthnot

Nay – none

Abstain - none

Open Discussion

Cooksey announced that Jay Scherder has resigned from his position as RAC's Director of Communications and Partnerships. She noted his impactful four-year tenure at RAC, and highlighted his achievements in media relations, partnerships, and crisis communication planning. Cooksey noted that Scherder's last day will be February 4, and the team plans to acknowledge and celebrate him after informing staff and commissioners. Cooksey then acknowledged that this departure is a significant loss but a great opportunity for Scherder, and that while she may not immediately replace his exact role, she will consider how to best use the resources saved from Scherder's departure, balancing budget considerations with organizational needs. Cooksey noted that RAC's team size has been reduced from 16 pre-pandemic to 11, and invited feedback as she prepares to make a public announcement next week.

Adjournment

Chair Ochoa called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion made by Gennaria, seconded by Fiorello and unanimously approved to adjourn the January 22, 2026 meeting of the Executive Committee at 9:36 a.m.

Votes were as follows:

Yea – Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Gennaria, Arbuthnot

Nay – none

Abstain - none





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Submitted by

L. Sutherlin, Exec. Asst. & Commission Administrator

ATTACHMENTS

- Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, September 3, 2025
- Government & Legal Affairs Attachments
- FY 2026 Work Plan

