REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS

314.863.5811
info@racstl.org
RACSTL.ORG

Regional Arts Commission
Executive Committee Minutes
Thursday, July 10, 2025 via ZOOM
8 a.m.

Call to Order & Committee Members in Attendance
Gennaria called the July 10, 2025 meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. and asked Lea to conduct the Committee roll call.

Committee Members in Attendance
Jerry Gennaria, chair, Tino Ochoa, vice chair, Sam Fiorello, secretary, John Russell, treasurer, Roz Johnson, Member-at-Large

Yea – Gennaria, Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Johnson
Nay – none
Abstain - none

Committee Members Absent
Rhonda Carter-Adams, Member-at-Large

Staff Attendees
Vanessa Cooksey, Lea Sutherlin

Approval of Minutes
Gennaria called for a motion to approve of the following Executive Committee meeting minutes - January 23, 2025 (Open & Closed Sessions); February 11, 2025 (Closed); March 25, 2025 (Closed); April 22, 2025 (Open Session)

Motion made by Johnson, seconded by Fiorello, and unanimously carried to approve the Executive Committee minutes – 1/23/25, 2/11/25, 3/25/25 and 4/22/25. Votes were as follows:

Yea – Gennaria, Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell, Johnson
Nay – none
Abstain - none

Gennaria asked Cooksey to share a recap from the Annual Board + Staff Retreat.

Annual Board + Staff Retreat Recap
Cooksey presented the Annual Board + Staff Retreat recap as follows: (1) the Board + Staff retreat was well-received, with strong participation from commissioners, staff, and consultants; (2) feedback from the survey was

314.863.5811
info@racstl.org
RACSTL.ORG

positive, highlighting appreciation for the facilitator, panels, and overall organization, with some suggestions; (3) regarding strategic planning - most respondents favored a five-year plan over a three-year one; (4) when discussing fundraising approaches - the majority preferred a "slow and steady" method rather than a big, immediate campaign, citing economic challenges and the current revenue from Hotel/Motel taxes; (5) noted that development activities would remain limited; and (6) overall, RAC's strategic direction was affirmed to continue as planned based on inputs, activities, outputs, tactics, outcomes and impact.

Gennaria shared the following: (1) the retreat format use of panels worked well; (2) pleased that a conclusion was reached; (3) acknowledged ongoing challenges with securing consistent funding, shared thoughts on a possible 'moonshot' fundraising project, the reluctance to pursue bold initiatives, and questions raised related to the value of endless fundraising efforts; and (4) suggestion that perhaps RAC should accept its current situation and recognize limitations, rather than pursuing major fundraising changes.

Fiorello shared the following: (1) also reflected on the idea of pursuing a "moonshot" project; and (2) emphasized that pursuing something radically different and innovative might be more feasible and impactful than staying with more conventional, crowded paths.

Gennaria agreed.

Discussion held regarding: (1) challenges of a conventional, capital campaign as RAC is not the traditional kind of organization to use that approach; (2) scarcity mindset and paradoxes of the current dynamic of philanthropy; and (3) skewed perception when considering Hotel/Motel tax revenue.

Sunshine Request - Holy Joe Society Update (Gennaria)
Gennaria gave the following update on the Holy Joe Society Sunshine Request: (1) he has been approached by Vince Schoemehl, with whom he's met twice, and who discussed potential meetings with RAC and the Sports Commission; (2) Atty. Kearbey has spoken with Judge Dierker at Holy Joe Society, and an investigator is reviewing the requested information; and (3) awaiting the final analysis.

Cooksey explained/clarified the following: (1) the main issue revolves around the 15% artist grants, which Atty. Kearbey and others believe should be treated as government-related expenses since RAC is considered a government entity and a nonprofit; and (2) she spoke with a rep from the Missouri Arts Council, who confirmed that Missouri does not use cost accounting, and instead treat all salaries as overhead without allocating specific costs to grants.

Ochoa noted the following: (1) legal considerations around the situation; (2) expressed confidence that RAC's documentation and expert input make the case less vulnerable to legal challenges; and (3) overall, feels cautious about litigation but trusts RAC's current approach and the advice of trusted colleagues like Atty. Kearbey, with emphasis on the importance of proper documentation and expert opinions to mitigate risks.

Fiorello concurred with Ochoa and noted that the process is going to cost time, attention and money.

314.863.5811
info@racstl.org
RACSTL.ORG

Russell explained that the 15% rule has been in place for the past 40 years and noted that RAC has undergone multiple audits annually and has reviewed legal opinions about this rule at least twice, to ensure compliance and proper understanding.

Cooksey agreed and noted that there is a copy of the St. Louis City attorney's legal opinion about the interpretation of the statute in RAC's financial policy manual.

Gennaria asked Cooksey to report on the draft FY26 Budget and work plan.

FY 2026 Budget & Work Plan (Cooksey)
Cooksey shared the draft of the FY 2026 Budget and Work Plan as follows: (1) informed by three key areas - RAC moving in a new direction from a strategy perspective, an environmental perspective including economic conditions, social conditions, legal conditions, and the Holy Joe Society Sunshine Request; (2) also informed by recent reports from Explore STL on Hotel/Motel payment shortfalls; (3) highlighted 2020-2025 Revenue Generation which also informs the draft FY26 budget and work plan; (4) RAC Revenue Generation Activities January 2020 - June 2025 – noted that most revenue has been – other than ARPA - from government, employee retention credits, PPP loans, sale of 6128, Edward Jones gift, 50/50 Raffle [low net] – don't think fundraising is a reality for RAC given the outcomes of some of the efforts; (5) also shared the June 2025 cash flow analysis which reflects an anticipated rollover; (6) considering a leaner operational model; and (7) emphasized the importance of transparency and articulating the methodology behind budget allocations, including how funding is distributed.

Brief discussion on potential adjustments including performance appraisals and merit increases, considering the current financial constraints.

Cooksey then asked this Committee for feedback on the strategic planning timeframe - whether to pursue a 3-year or 5-year plan, and highlighted flexibility.

Johnson noted that she would need additional time to consider the strategic direction and timeframe and asked Cooksey the deadline for response.

Cooksey shared that the timeframe should be finalized prior to the November annual board meeting.

Johnson then left for her next meeting.

Discussion held on (1) importance of aligning the budget and workforce strategy with the organization's broader goals of investment, amplification, and leadership in arts and culture; and (2) follow-up meetings, including an additional session of this Committee in August, to review progress and finalize decisions.

Committee members expressed overall trust in Cooksey's leadership and approach, with emphasis on thoughtful planning during a period of organizational change.

Fiorello asked Cooksey to send this Committee her preference for the strategic direction timeframe.

314.863.5811
info@racstl.org
RACSTL.ORG

Review Board Terms/Discuss FY 2026 Officers

Discussion held regarding Board terms and upcoming FY 2026 officers as follows: (1) Johnson's term ends in January and she is not eligible for reappointment - replacement from the city will be needed; (2) Ochoa is eligible for reappointment, and efforts are underway to reappoint Nickens, with Sutherlin working on it; (3) the current stable situation includes Ochoa as chair, Fiorello as vice chair, and Russell as treasurer, but the secretary position will need to be filled; (4) potential candidates for secretary, emphasizing the importance of tenure, engagement, and diversity; (5) additional possible strategies; (6) highlighted the need to maintain diversity and balance between city and county representation; and (7) plans to continue this discussion at the next/additional meeting in August.

Sutherlin suggested the additional meeting of this Committee be held prior to the next Governance Committee meeting on August 7, as this agenda item will also be discussed at that time.

Gennaria asked Sutherlin to poll for August 4 or August 5 for the additional Executive Committee meeting.

Adjournment

Gennaria called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion made by Fiorello, seconded by Russell and unanimously approved to adjourn the regular session of the July 10, 2025 of the Executive Committee at 9:08 a.m.

Votes were as follows:

Yea – Gennaria, Ochoa, Fiorello, Russell
Nay – none
Abstain - none

Submitted by
L. Sutherlin, Exec. Asst. & Commission Administrator