



## Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, July 16, 2024 | 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting: In Person (Tampa, FL) and Virtually

**Board Members Present:** Christian Winterbottom, Allison Davis, Rebecca Kapusta, Kyle Baltuch, Gege Kreischer, Larry Pintacuda, Claudia Davant, Chris Card

\*\*The number of board members present met the requirements for a quorum.

**Staff Members Present:** Erin Smeltzer, Lauren Wofford, Denise Bishop, Lori Stegmeyer, Melissa Clements, Bill Kirchhoff

**Reading and Approval of Minutes:** Ted Granger, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at approximately 1:10 pm and asked for the previous meetings minutes from April 24, 2024 to be approved. Kyle motioned, Gege second, all were in favor.

**Finance Committee Report:** Lauren Wofford, CFO, reviewed the budget comparison for 2023-2024 versus 2024-2025, previously shared with the finance committee. She proposed a 5% salary increase for staff and a 6% increase for C-Suite executives. The organization has an unexpended revenue balance of \$216,000 and an overall budget of approximately \$30 million.

Ted commended the leadership for the Forum's strong financial performance and efforts to enhance salaries across the organization. Erin noted that we have lost only two staff members this year—one due to a contract conclusion and the other voluntarily left but requested to return shortly thereafter.

The budget did not require approval at this meeting, as it was reviewed and approved during the supplemental board meeting on July 12, 2024. Lauren also presented the financial statements for July 1, 2023, to May 31, 2024. Changes in the financial format were implemented following recommendations from Nonprofits First, including the addition of a comparative year-to-date analysis to better track organizational growth relative to the previous year. An adjustment for over-under budget items was made for clarity regarding current billings.

As of May 31, \$22.9 million has been raised for this fiscal year, with an operating income of \$112,000.

In response to Ted's inquiry about the remaining 44% of the Help Me Grow (HMG) budget, Lauren explained that this is the first year with increased HMG funding. The delay in executing contracts from the Department of Education until October necessitated rapid coordination with affiliates, allowing time for appropriate staffing adjustments. Erin added that we have been assisting one affiliate in aligning their billing structure with state contracts.

Lauren shared that the balance sheet and statement of cash flows are in good standing, with healthy asset ratios.

A motion to approve the budget and financial statements was made by Kyle and seconded by Gege; all members voted in favor.

### **Forum Update:**

Erin announced that Denise Bishop has transitioned into the role of Executive Chief of Staff, while Jessica Cherry has taken on the Chief Operating Officer position. Denise reported that the new building is thriving, with more staff utilizing the space. The only ongoing issue is the consistency of the air conditioning throughout the suite; however, building management has been responsive and has replaced several units. Bill is working to connect a generator to the air conditioning system that supports the server room to prevent overheating during power failures.

Plans for a building open house are underway, coinciding with The Forum's 30th anniversary, with dates to be announced soon.

### **Staff Handbook Updates:**

The Department of Education's Office of Early Learning (DEL) did not approve our proposed FMLA qualifying event requirements. We are actively seeking to secure DEL approval for a broader range of medical events to qualify for paid FMLA leave. Additionally, staff policies are being revised to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Erin noted that managers are currently rewriting direct reports' job descriptions to ensure they are thorough and compliant with the Fair Labor Standards Act, which will determine Exempt versus Non-Exempt status.

### **Program Updates:**

Erin and Claudia Davant discussed strengthening relationships with state Senators, aiming to replicate the rapport established with House members. Claudia emphasized that expanding these connections will benefit The Forum and its mission.

Lori provided an update on the TEACH program, which has seen its budget increase from \$11 million to \$17 million. The TEACH team awarded \$1 million in claims within the first 90 days and successfully transitioned numerous individuals into new scholarships. DEL has approved regular scholarships for Early Learning Coalition (ELC) staff, following a successful pilot last

year. As long as there are no waiting list issues for teachers or directors, ELC staff will be prioritized.

In terms of Software as a Service (SaaS), the national office is pursuing a buildout, and The Forum is in discussions to undertake this project at no cost while maintaining the SaaS contract. Bill mentioned that while we have been operating the portal, the proposed buildout will significantly enhance user experience.

Melissa informed the committee that the Miami career service team's contract is concluding, necessitating swift allocation of scholarships by July 1, 2024. Most team members will join the TEACH team, with one member potentially retained through a JP Morgan grant, with updates expected soon.

Lena Intervention continues to provide coaching for teachers, focusing on enhancing conversational interactions with children. Last fiscal year, LENA serviced 235 classrooms and is targeting 150 classrooms for the upcoming year. A record 4,500 assessments were completed last year, and we have received a purchase order for 4,300 assessments for this fiscal year.

Denise reported that HMG secured \$4.5 million in funding, with \$1.8 million recurring and \$2.6 million non-recurring. The aim is to convert the non-recurring portion into recurring funding, which is vital for program sustainability. We have expanded into additional counties and have submitted several Requests for Applications (RFAs) statewide. An internal evaluation of HMG is planned ahead of the upcoming legislative session.

Public relations and marketing efforts are ramping up to enhance visibility. We successfully rebid and retained our contract with DCF, which includes additional virtual training for inspectors.

Ted inquired about the depth of our research beyond traditional metrics. Denise confirmed that some forthcoming research will emphasize qualitative assessments.

Erin announced that Bainum has funded our Advocacy Fellowship for another year, and the latest cohort of fellows will launch tonight. Membership continues to grow, with approximately 120 new members joining each month, supported by successful monthly training sessions.

Ted commended the staff for establishing The Forum as a pivotal convener in early learning across the state, echoing similar praise from Gege.

The meeting concluded at 2:30 PM, transitioning into a closed executive session.