

NOTES OF THE JULY 20, 2009, STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PROGRAMS COMMITTEE MEETING

The Strategic Planning and Programs Committee (“the Committee”) of the Smithsonian Board of Regents met on Monday, July 20, 2009, at 10:00 a.m. at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Participating were Committee Chair Doris Matsui and members Judy Huret*, Shirley Ann Jackson*, and Paul Neely. Committee members W. Clark Bunting, Christopher J. Dodd, Phillip Frost, and Patrick Leahy were unable to participate. Staff in attendance were Secretary G. Wayne Clough, Executive Assistant to the Secretary Patricia Bartlett, Assistant to Congresswoman Matsui Julie Eddy, Senior Writer-Editor for the Office of the Regents Barbara Feininger, Assistant to Senator Leahy Julia Gagne*, Chief of Staff to the Regents John K. Lapiana, General Counsel Judith Leonard, Assistant to Senator Dodd Colin McGinnis*, and Director of the Office of Policy and Analysis Carole M.P. Neves.

Call to Order and Overview of the Meeting’s Agenda

Committee Chair Doris Matsui called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m. She thanked the Committee members for accommodating the meeting’s rescheduling, which had been done to allow for refinements to the current draft of the Smithsonian’s strategic plan. She noted that Secretary Clough would provide an overview of the draft plan and that the Committee members’ substantive review and discussion would inform its next iteration. The Chair said that the revised plan then would be circulated to members of both the Strategic Planning and Programs Committee and the Executive Committee for comment and that a final draft strategic plan would be written under the direction of Carole Neves during August 2009. She added that both committees would review the final draft of the strategic plan during their respective meetings on September 14, 2009, and that, if the two committees concurred, the final draft of the strategic plan would then be presented for review and approval by the full Board during its September 21, 2009, meeting.

Current Draft of the Smithsonian’s Strategic Plan

Secretary Clough reminded the Committee that the strategic planning process included three discrete phases, after which the implementation of the strategic plan — a fourth phase — would be launched. He reported that phases one and two, the information-gathering and scenario-planning stages of the process, had been robust and inclusive processes that had been conducted with the assistance of Booz Allen Hamilton and Global Business Network. He said that the decision to conduct the third phase (writing the strategic plan) in-house had been made in recognition of the expertise that Smithsonian staff would bring to the creation of the strategic plan document. The Secretary noted that the internally staffed 22-member Strategic Planning Steering Committee had remained engaged throughout the planning process and said that opportunities to review and provide input on the draft plan had been provided to that committee, as well as to the directors of Smithsonian museums and units. He added that, with the ongoing review of

** participated by teleconference*

the Regents' Strategic Planning and Programs Committee and Executive Committee, the Smithsonian's final strategic plan would reflect the contributions of numerous stakeholders.

The Secretary said that the development of the plan had benefited from the review of the strategic plans of several museum complexes and government agencies with characteristics similar to those of the Smithsonian, and included such organizations as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of Agriculture, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Library of Congress. He emphasized that the plan had a number of "masters," including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB); must do more than support an internal organizational process; and would be critical to the development of the Smithsonian's budget with OMB, among other things.

Secretary Clough directed the Committee to the draft strategic plan document and a pyramid-like graphic of the strategic plan's framework. He noted that the apex of the strategic plan graph — the Smithsonian's historic mission statement about the increase and diffusion of knowledge — was followed by five widening levels of activity: a vision statement, values and guiding principles, sharpening focus or "grand challenges," goals and strategies, and outcomes. He said that the final document would begin with a letter from the Secretary. A background statement about the Smithsonian would follow, and then the strategic plan itself. The Secretary said that, although the plan would be directed towards fiscal years 2010 through 2015, many of its elements would extend far beyond that five-year period.

The Committee discussed the need to balance the practical and visionary aspects of the plan. Because the plan will support the Smithsonian's Federal budget negotiations, it must provide a framework for the Smithsonian's needs and goals over the next five fiscal years. It also must lay the groundwork to address the long-term goals, or "grand challenges," that will be the focus of Institutional efforts in the decades to come.

Secretary Clough said that the plan's development required the ability to shift the Institution's focus between its broader, long-term goals and short-term needs. He said that the final strategic plan would address the Smithsonian's overarching objectives and strategies. More detailed information and goals would be based upon the strategic plan but articulated in the Smithsonian's statement of its annual goals. He said that the "grand challenges" outlined in the strategic plan framework would be addressed through ongoing year-to-year interdisciplinary initiatives designed to sharpen the Institution's efforts and focus over time.

The Committee then discussed the strategic plan's vision statement (shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and educating the world) and its tagline (inspiring through discovery and knowledge). Mr. Neely commented that reversing the tagline to state "inspiring through knowledge and discovery" would better reflect the difference between the Smithsonian's current resources versus its aspirational goals.

The Committee next reviewed the 10 values outlined in the draft document. Dr. Jackson suggested, and the Committee agreed, that three of the values (discovery, excellence, innovation) were overarching goals, whereas the others (accountability, collaboration, diversity, integrity, openness, relevance, service) were the means by which the overarching values would be actualized. The Secretary clarified that the term “openness” was intended to be broad in its meaning and included such issues as accessibility and transparency.

The Secretary then discussed the “sharpening focus” level of the strategic plan framework. Noting that the language of each was not yet final, he explained that the four areas of sharpening focus, or “grand challenges,” were:

- What does it mean to be American?
- How do we understand the heritage, diversity, and creativity of the world’s people?
- Is life on Earth heading for the collapse of some ecosystems a major extinction event?
- How do we unlock the mysteries of the universe?

He explained that the themes reflected the reframing of the Smithsonian’s resources (what it has now) to help it attain its goals (what it aspires to do). He said that the Smithsonian’s ability to review, reconsider, and reshape its responses to these four issues would establish the Institution’s relevance and determine where it should focus its resources in the future. As an example, the Committee discussed the multiple roots of the American experience and the Smithsonian’s potential to tell a coherent story of this society through the identification and expression of its common, binding, and even contradictory threads.

With regard to the draft plan’s explanation of each area of “sharpening focus,” Mr. Neely suggested reorganizing each section by first identifying the problem or context and then stating the Smithsonian’s leadership potential in that area. He also proposed rephrasing the third theme to state “How do we confront the major ecological challenges to the Earth?” The Committee agreed that both changes would provide clarity to the document, and that the second suggestion would better reflect the Smithsonian’s position of neutral leadership.

Consideration of the fourth challenge, unlocking the mysteries of the universe, prompted a discussion about the Smithsonian’s established versus potential, or aspirational, leadership in different disciplines. The Committee noted that, although the Smithsonian is a world-recognized leader in astrophysical studies, most Americans were unaware of the fact that that work is supported by the efforts of one-sixth of Smithsonian staff. With regard to other initiatives, such as addressing major ecological challenges to the Earth, Mr. Neely commented that the Smithsonian’s role could be described as that of a “neutral convener.” The Committee agreed that, although progress would be made on all four challenges over the next five years, each was a long-term initiative that would require a sustained effort to address.

The Secretary then directed the discussion towards the goals and strategies section of the draft strategic plan. The seven goals, each of which was supported by a series of strategies,

fell under three overarching themes:

- focusing on grand challenges
- reaching broader audiences by expanding access
- ensuring organizational excellence

The first theme—focusing on grand challenges—was addressed in the strategic plan’s first goal:

Goal 1: Increase the impact of the Smithsonian by undertaking pan-Institutional, interdisciplinary initiatives addressing the four focus areas.

The second theme—reaching broader audiences by expanding access—was addressed in the next three goals:

Goal 2: Create an integrated, balanced research, public program, outreach, and education portfolio that embodies excellence, creativity, and openness to new ideas and enables the Smithsonian to fulfill its service role.

Goal 3: Use digital technologies and other media and the interactive exchange of ideas to improve access by new generations and diverse audiences to museum collections, programs, and expertise.

Goal 4: Offer audiences to the Smithsonian outstanding and welcoming museum experiences that surprise, inform, delight, inspire, and encourage ongoing learning.

Secretary Clough explained that goals two, three, and four reflected the Smithsonian’s commitment to transforming the way it reaches audiences. He said that the strategies that will support each goal were designed to reach audiences from cultural, ethnic, and age groups across the globe through both physical and digital means and added that sets of measurables would be attached to every strategy during the implementation of the strategic plan.

The Secretary said that the first and second themes addressed the need to combine and offer the Smithsonian’s resources in both conventional and new ways. He noted that the third theme—ensuring organizational excellence—concerned the need to provide an organizational structure that will ensure leadership and excellence in these efforts and added that the strategic plan’s final three goals were designed to address the third theme:

Goal 5: Build an entrepreneurial and innovative Smithsonian organizational culture that is aligned with the mission, emphasizes organizational learning, is flexible, service-oriented, collaborative, transparent, and accountable, and sets a leadership standard for scientific and cultural organizations.

Goal 6: Effectively carry out our stewardship responsibilities.

Goal 7: Provide the support services and acquire public and private resources to

enable our workforce—our most valuable asset—to successfully realize the Smithsonian’s mission.

Secretary Clough then directed the Committee back to the graph of the strategic plan framework and noted that the Goals and Strategies section was followed by Outcomes, the base (and final) section of the graph. He said that the desired outcomes of the strategic plan would be assessed yearly using measurables found in the Smithsonian’s annual statement of its fiscal year goals, not the strategic plan.

Discussion

The Committee then discussed the draft strategic plan. Regarding its format, Ms. Matsui inquired about both the number and numbering of the goals and strategies. Dr. Neves explained that, although the draft document was enumerated to support the Committee’s discussions, the final document would not require this format.

Dr. Jackson suggested that the final strategic plan, and in particular the strategies in support of the first goal, would benefit from a stronger emphasis on pan-institutional initiatives. She also noted that addressing the challenges presented in the third and fifth goals would each require investments in human capital and, in particular, technology training for all staff. The Committee agreed that, although the Institution currently did not possess the intellectual or physical infrastructure necessary to realize these goals, the final strategic plan should include a commitment to the development of a highly skilled workforce, among other things.

The Committee then discussed the broad characteristics of a “highly skilled workforce” and issues of diversity, noting that the meaning of each should embrace diversity of ethnic background, training, education, and outlook. The Committee also agreed that both the strategic plan and the Smithsonian’s workforce should reflect the diversity of American culture. Mr. Neely proposed that the strategies in support of the fifth goal be expanded to address the Smithsonian’s commitment to a diverse, highly trained staff.

Secretary Clough said that the Smithsonian’s commitment to sustainability also should be clear in the final strategic plan. He noted that, as just discussed with regard to diversity and a highly skilled workforce, the Smithsonian’s commitment to sustainability should address more than the responsible stewardship of the Earth and its environments, and explained that the Smithsonian’s buildings, workforce, and exhibition content, among other things, should likewise reflect an overarching commitment to sustainability. The Secretary added that the goals and values of the strategic plan should overlap, that all should speak to the Institution as a whole, and that each should reflect the Smithsonian’s core ethic. Using the design for the new National Museum of African American History and Culture as an example, he said that the green construction of that building should not reflect a discrete initiative but rather should demonstrate an ongoing commitment to furthering the conservation and sustainability of resources.

Ms. Huret proposed separating the two elements of the seventh goal—staff and financial resources—into two different goals. She added that financial accountability also should be

included in the strategic plan. Dr. Jackson noted, and the Committee agreed, that the strategic plan provided an important opportunity to explain the Smithsonian's unique status as an organization that is primarily Federally funded, but also dependant upon private financial support.

Ms. Matsui then reminded the Committee that, because the final draft of the strategic plan would be written in August 2009 and reviewed by two committees on September 14, 2009, the window of opportunity to offer refinements to the plan was drawing to a close. She asked that Mr. Lapiana send an e-mail requesting final edits from Committee members and that any proposed changes be sent to Dr. Neves and Ms. Bartlett, with a copy to Secretary Clough. Dr. Neves commented on the importance of the Committee's responses to the draft plan and agreed to provide another draft to the Committee one week in advance of its September 14 meeting. Ms. Matsui also assured staff that Committee members would be available to respond via e-mail or phone to any questions that might arise in the interim. Ms. Bartlett noted that the Smithsonian's directors would be given another opportunity to review the draft plan and that the Committee would be contacted should any issues arise from those discussions.

The Committee acknowledged that the draft strategic plan presented on September 14 should be considered as close to final as possible, as the final strategic plan would be presented for the Regents' approval during the morning session of the Board's September 21, 2009, meeting. Ms. Matsui added that the annual public meeting of the Board, which was scheduled for that day's afternoon session, would provide for the public launch of the strategic plan. She said that the Board would receive support from Director of Communications and Public Affairs Evelyn Lieberman on how to best present and discuss the plan.

Mr. Neely then posed what he characterized as a philosophical question: What were the hard choices that had been made about what to leave out of the plan? Secretary Clough responded that, because the focus of the strategic planning process had been directed towards transformative, high-impact, interdisciplinary initiatives that offer the potential for relevant and meaningful change, the plan did not address issues that were considered either too narrow or too broad.

The Secretary noted that two goals — sharpening the Smithsonian's focus and broadening access to it — were different, which Ms. Huret restated as "the how versus the what." Ms. Huret asked if there was a risk that the strategic plan could be so aspirational that it presented insurmountable funding challenges. The Secretary replied that, although that risk existed, it would be better to fall short of lofty goals than to meet undemanding goals that don't maximize the Smithsonian's potential.

Ms. Huret then commented on the importance of positioning and developing a fund-raising initiative in tandem with the strategic plan's goals. Mr. Neely noted that repackaging information about what the Smithsonian already does into more expansive terms would support both initiatives. The Secretary added that it will be critical that the strategic plan and the national campaign both convey the scope, sum, and relevance of what the

Smithsonian does. He emphasized that each should include an “urgency statement” that explains why it is important to address identified issues now and what will be the potential impact of such efforts.

Dr. Neves agreed that the strategic plan offered an important opportunity to publicize the Smithsonian’s many high-profile accomplishments, as well as to demonstrate the Smithsonian’s capacity to contribute to high-impact initiatives of the future. She said that the strategic plan should convey both what the Smithsonian is and what it can be, and thanked the Committee for their thoughtful contributions to the plan’s development.

Adjournment

The Chair thanked the members of the Committee and staff for their participation and contributions. The meeting was then adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Doris Matsui, Chair