

## **MINUTES OF THE APRIL 28, 2022, STRATEGY, INNOVATION, AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE MEETING**

The Strategy, Innovation, and Technology Committee (“Committee”) of the Board of Regents (“Board”) of the Smithsonian Institution (“Smithsonian”) held a videoconference meeting on April 28, 2022. Participating were Committee Chair Michael Lynton and Committee members Representative Doris Matsui, Steve Case, Michael Crow, Michael Govan, Risa J. Lavizzo-Mourey, and Franklin D. Raines.

Also present by invitation of the Committee were Secretary Lonnie Bunch; Chief of Staff to the Secretary Greg Bettwy; Associate General Counsel Craig Blackwell; Director of the National Museum of African Art Ngaire Blankenberg; Chief Information Officer Deron Burba; Under Secretary for Administration Ron Cortez; Deputy Chief of Staff to the Regents Kate Forester; Special Assistant to the Regents Mallory Gianola (recorder); Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer Ginny Gomez; Under Secretary for Museums and Culture Kevin Gover; Acting Under Secretary for Administration Doug Hall; Inspector General Cathy Helm; Head of Digital Transformation Becky Kobberod; President of Smithsonian Enterprises Carol LeBlanc; Chief of Staff to Representative Doris Matsui, Jeremy Marcus; Assistant Secretary for Communications and External Affairs and Chief Marketing Officer Julissa Marengo; Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer Meroë Park; Director of the Office of Government Relations Vernon Simms; Under Secretary for Science and Research Ellen Stofan; and Chief of Staff to the Regents Porter Wilkinson.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Committee Chair Michael Lynton called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

### **REVIEW OF THE DECEMBER 15, 2021, COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the draft minutes of the December 15, 2021, Committee meeting were approved without modification.

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE**

Secretary Bunch and Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer Meroë Park provided an update on the progress of strategic plan implementation efforts. The Secretary noted the Committee’s discussion would serve as a preview to the larger discussion planned for the Board meeting in June 2022. Secretary Bunch reminded the Committee that over the last year, there have been a number of efforts to clarify and streamline the focus of the Smithsonian’s strategic plan and advance Our Shared Future both within and outside the Smithsonian. The senior leadership team identified five strategic focus areas, under the Our Shared Future umbrella, to narrow that focus and guide the Institution’s strategic implementation efforts; they are Digital,

Nimble, Trusted Source, Science, and Education. In September 2021, the Strategic Planning Implementation Team (“StratTeam”) mapped 25 more detailed and actionable initiatives to the five strategic focus areas. The Deputy Secretary informed the Committee that the StratTeam has identified co-leads and developed snapshots for the initiatives, welcomed the inaugural participants in the StratTeam Rotation Program, developed a strategic implementation tool that will track initiative progress, and is preparing a Smithsonian-wide update on the implementation work. The Committee reviewed the following in their materials: the list of initiatives and their co-leads, a sample initiative snapshot that captured the Smithsonian’s efforts to build a universal membership model, and screenshots that demonstrated the functionality of the Strategic Implementation Tool.

## **DIGITAL STRATEGY**

Becky Kobberod, the Smithsonian’s first Head of Digital Transformation, briefed the Committee on the Institution’s digital transformation strategy. The goal of this strategy is to build a digital-first Virtual Smithsonian that leverages digital capabilities and platforms to reach new audiences across the nation and around the world, while representing disciplines across the arts, sciences, history, culture, technology, and design. Ms. Kobberod shared her vision for the new Office of Digital Transformation and what to expect as the Smithsonian increases its digital presence and impact. The Committee reviewed recent milestones and the external and internal focus areas identified for digital transformation. Ms. Kobberod reminded the Committee that nurturing a digital institutional culture has already begun, as the Smithsonian has worked to digitize its collections and launch Open Access to make them accessible to the public; piloted new technology, including The Searchable Museum at the National Museum of African American History and Culture to advance accessibility, scholarship, education, and audience engagement; and launched the beginning plans to build two new museums, which will initially launch virtually. The Committee discussed identifying potential gaps in the digital transformation strategy and clarifying the foundational activities that should be prioritized first to gain momentum. Ms. Kobberod also sought the Committee’s feedback on leveraging strategic partnerships to pilot some of the Smithsonian’s technology ideas.

## **DEACCESSION OF BENIN BRONZES**

Director of the National Museum of African Art Ngaire Blankenberg presented the proposed deaccession and subsequent title transfer to Nigeria of 29 Benin Bronzes, a name that is used to cover a variety of artifacts including brass plaques, carved elephant tusks, ivory leopard statues, and wooden heads. The National Museum of African Art (“NMAFA”) removed the Benin Bronzes on display in October 2021 and began the process of deaccession, including valuation of the collection items and conducting provenance research. It was recommended that the bronzes, which were removed during the 1897 British raid of Benin City, be returned to Nigeria’s National Commission for Museums and Monuments. The Secretary informed the Committee that the return of the bronzes would be the first planned repatriation under the Smithsonian’s new policy of ethical returns and noted that NMAFA’s Collection Management Policy also establishes repatriation as a ground for deaccessioning.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Strategy, Innovation, and Technology Committee approved the following motion for recommendation to the Board of Regents:

**VOTED** that the Strategy, Innovation, and Technology Committee recommends that the Board of Regents approves the Secretary’s request to deaccession twenty-nine (29) Benin Kingdom court style artworks in the collection of the National Museum of African Art and transfer title and return the artworks to Nigeria’s National Commission for Museums and Monuments as the representative of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

#### **EXHIBITIONS, PROGRAM PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATIONAL CONTENT**

Under Secretary for Museums and Culture Kevin Gover reported on public programming activities and reviewed the exhibition calendar. Mr. Gover highlighted one research project and one upcoming exhibition for the Committee’s awareness. The research project discussed was the Catocin Furnace Research Project at the National Museum of Natural History (“NMNH”), which is an ongoing collaboration with Harvard University and 23andMe, Inc., and focuses on the use of whole genome data to identify potential genetic relationships. The exhibition discussed was *We Belong Here* at the National Museum of American History, which will open to the public on June 23, 2022. The opening will coincide with the 50th anniversary of the federal legislation that helped bring equal opportunity to sports. *We Belong Here* features Naomi Osaka’s tennis racquet from the 2020 U.S. Open Tennis Championship, the U.S. National Soccer team jersey worn by Samantha Mewis when she was named U.S. Soccer Player of the Year in 2020, and a T-shirt made by skateboarder Leo Baker, a trans, non-binary athlete, to express their identity in 2019.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to consider and no request for an executive session, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Michael M. Lynton, Chair