

Leonardo Board Retreat, January 3, 2010

Kala Institute, Berkeley, CA

Present: Nina Czegledy, Tami Spector, Meredith Tromble, Darlene Tong, Roger Malina, Marcia Tanner, Greg Harper, Jim Crutchfield, Melinda Klayman (for part of meeting)

Absent: Jeff Babcock, Steve Wilson

Staff: Pam Grant-Ryan Pat Bentson, Kathleen Quillian

Guest: Ann Dabovitch

Moderator: Jerry Allen

Start time: 10:30am

Introductions.

Jerry explained that most boards are in transition. The strengths of Leonardo are that it has been nimble, finds opportunities and acts on them which is always push/pull. Successful organizations have resources, a plan and are able to seize on opportunities when they come along. But in order to do that, an organization needs a strategic plan and hopefully this will be a start.

New Year's Resolutions: Jerry showed a list of answers the board sent in on their new year's resolutions. Marcia hopes that we can figure out what we're doing, agree on it and stick to it. Jim says he feels that it's not appropriate for a small tech group to figure out the world's problems but thinks we should rather open up the discussion and asks what could Leonardo do to open up dialogue. Meredith feels that as a group the board has had good will and clarity, and the clarity needs to grow but it can't be forced. Greg sees the situation as a chicken and egg problem (Who are we? How do we survive? And which of these issues should we focus on first?). Roger wanted to reinforce Jim's concern and mentioned an anecdote about someone in Egypt who is on the YASMIN list who said that art and science is what rich kids do. This is not what Roger wants to do; he would rather use the resources of the organization to try to solve the world's problems (by identifying and addressing the "burning issues").

Strategic Planning: Jerry pointed out that the purpose of strategic planning is to instill a culture of strategic thinking, not necessarily to solve all the problems of the organization. A strategic plan is also a good document to show to funders, but the real idea is to adjust the culture of the organization to be continuously thinking strategically. The strategic plan has three elements: the mission, the community and the organization's capabilities. The organization then needs to find "the fit" between all three. This often means narrowing its focus. Strategic planning is a map from "where we are now" to "where we want to be" and the journey between the two is not always linear.

Leonardo Board Assessment: Tami pointed out that the organization seems to be insular. We don't know what other similar organizations are doing and we don't know what our own organization wants since our community doesn't really tell us. Jim said that his experience from working with the Santa Fe Institute is that with so many disciplines involved, it's hard to find a focus. Greg thinks we seem to be really in the business of recognizing good ideas and authors but we don't seem to think of it in that manner and he thinks it's important to be in that position. Roger said that we seem to be fighting old wars. It's hard to envision what the world will be like in 10 years so it's hard for us to plan for it so instead we focus on fixing past problems. Jerry offered that he is always skeptical about how far in the future an organization can look, so for that reason, he would like to limit us to a 5 year plan.

Board Comments: Greg sees a problem between Leonardo's lack of leadership and Leonardo's board assessment on resolving conflicts. Nina confirmed Leonardo's international reputation from her own personal experience working with LEAF. Marcia pointed out that the board has plenty of leaders but finding an executive director seems like it would help the organization figure out how to accomplish its goals. Roger asked if the organization wants to get bigger? Or more effective? Or both?

Previous Planning Efforts: Marcia pointed out that audience expansion seems to go hand in hand with donor expansion; so, if we expand our audience, do we follow dollars or vision? Greg said that any organization that has the word “art” in its name has trouble with expansion since many people don’t appreciate the power of art. Jim feels that science seems to be more open to art over the last decade. Major science journals have art sections in them now. Jerry concurred that there is a deep anti-intellectual problem in the US. Roger argued that we shouldn’t think of ourselves as an organization that publishes a print journal since 90% of our audience has never seen the actual print journal. They mostly see the journal online. In terms of “creative filtering” (Greg’s term) peer-reviewed journals are only one way of recognizing good ideas, another is by giving awards. Jim pointed out that funding science is accepted because the funders believe they are building industry. Art funding does not have the same potential funders to help build the new creative industries. Roger likes Greg’s statement that we are recognizing good ideas and their authors, but the question is how do we do that? Pat pointed out that we re-defined our mission and vision statement last year, but we never made a plan for how to implement our re-defined mission and vision.

Leonardo Mission: Jerry asked the board to come up with three words or phrases that each thinks should define the organization in five years.

- Ann Dabovitch: global leader in recognizing and promoting the most post-disciplinary ideas of our time and to be perceived of to be the global leader in this domain; to serve the Leonardo community through excellence and to accomplish the above in an economically viable manner for continuity
- Jim: distributed (develop process that is adoptable), self-organizing (teach others how to do it) and sustainable (points to continuity)
- Marcia: global leader in educating the public in catalyzing transformation on global challenges; economically effective organization;
- Roger: catalyze (residencies), champion (young Leonardos and new career paths) and enable (innovative art, science collaborations for all excluded communities, from Fresno to South Africa);
- Darlene: more effectively address global issues; communication in multiple forms; broader demographic;
- Pam: facilitate a positive change; identify and facilitate creative ideas that come out of synthetic thinking;
- Pat: connecting ideas and authors to solving real-world problems; education about how art and science can solve these critical issues; inter-disciplinary programs and projects (beyond publishing);
- Meredith: relationship, hope (would be great to contribute to an envisioning that is different from “American way” of life), radicality (70s idealism has been tarnished by totalitarianism);
- Tami: cutting edge in content and technological form; scientifically relevant;
- Greg: decentralized international society exercising centralized discretion;
- Nina: remain open to innovations and changes throughout next 5 years especially education; to invest time and energy in international constituency; further develop and maintain cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaborations;

Jerry asked the board to think about whether these terms were congruent with the organization’s current mission statement.

BREAK

Small Group Discussions: based on the discussions about mission and vision Jerry asked the board to divide into two small groups to develop a scenario for Leonardo in 5 years that fulfills its mission.

Reports on small group discussions:

Group 1 – Group discussion

Major programming (now): online print publishing

Major programming (developing): salon in NY, LASERs, International, LEAF, online non-journal, affiliate member, conferences, YASMIN

Programs (potential): more cutting edge technology

Events: real and/or virtual, international, reach new people, balance w/resources

Publishing: LEA increase, promote LASER worldwide, increased social relevance

Partnerships: affiliate organizations (Academy of Science, ZeroOne, Exploratorium)

Education: initiative = young people

Exhibitions

Speaker Network

Audiences (now): grad students, media, core group, more art than science

Audiences (future): excluded audiences, science community, K-12 and undergrad, diverse beyond art and science, geographic (China)

Challenges: money, board composition, need consensus and focus, example of a “grand challenge”, need niche (Topic? Method? Audiences? Education, “excluded” science? Social issues, focus attention)

Resources: ourselves, how to present as funded, transition funding, Executive Director, new board for fundraising, distributed organization, chapters, infrastructure for international board is obstacle

Potential partners: like-minded (Academy of Science, ZeroOne, Exploratorium, universities, OLATS), “excluded” community orgs, center for eco-literacy, hybrid and informal education, media la Prado, kitchen Hungary, international, merge with other organizations, strategic alliances

Structure/org: Exec. Director, definition of positions (board, staff, programming roles, oversight by board), central node w/global board re/action, governing board and content board, global consultant, central knowledge and approval of global activity, potential partnerships, resources require, challenges to be overcome

Summary (Roger): We need to figure out who we are before we figure out who we want to be. We need to bring in more expertise to the board. We need to figure out innovative ways to bring in money.

Group 2 – Group discussion

Activities: journal, web site, portal, workshops, salons, LeoTube, Artxhive.org (media bulletin board)

Structure and organization: putting together and sticking with strategic plan, have creative zone, multi-lingual

Partners: Google, Langlois Foundation, Exploratorium, defining partnership with OLATS

Audience: working more with international creative class, including younger audience

Challenges to overcome: consensus among board, discipline, clarifying relationships with Leonardo satellites, managing and strengthening Leonardo brand

Summary (Greg): Half of the group's discussion was about moving to web 2.0 and what that entails and what that means; Jim suggested putting energy into being an archive. Greg agrees with Roger's assessment that we don't know who we are now so how can we figure out who we want to be in the future?

Full Group Discussion: Roger says that an issue he sees is that we don't have a programming board, and we also don't have a mechanism in order to connect with the people who are doing the work that makes the organization. Jerry clarified that what Leonardo currently has is in fact more of a programming board than a governing board. Jim pointed out that if we had a true governing board, they would be expected to give \$30,000 to \$40,000. The programming board can't be expected to do that. Ann was asked how much the Exploratorium board is asked to donate. She responded that they are asked to consider their donation to the Exploratorium only second to their alma mater. This usually turns out to be somewhere between \$1,000 to \$450,000. Jerry said that in order to make a strategic plan, the board needs to make a group that includes members of the audience and stakeholders. If you involve these two groups in defining the organization, they are more likely to support the organization.

Resource Analysis: Jerry pointed out that an executive director is not going to help with contributed income. If you ask someone to raise their own salary, you won't get the kind of executive director you want/need. Jim mentioned that he would rather bring in a development director before an executive director. Greg thinks we need a plan and we need to find a strategic godfather who would buy into our prestige. Jerry pointed out that a strategic plan can not be done internally because it's hard to be objective. He also mentioned that the cost runs around \$30,000 to \$50,000. Pat mentioned that part of what an executive director can do is be the public face of the organization, which a development director can't be. An executive director needs a support staff too so we'd have to think in terms of hiring more than one person. Ann agreed that you can't really get a development director without an executive director. Brand recognition and history are huge strengths of Leonardo which puts the organization in good stead with funders and Silicon Valley. What would it take to get a senior executive at Google to want to join this board? Who are the people who are subscribing to the journal and giving \$500? Those people should be embraced by the board and brought into the fold, which will then cause a ripple affect of bringing new people. She's sure that the organization could find some kind of partner for capacity funding like Hewlett Packard and Kresge. People will buy into a grand vision if it's grand enough. Greg suggested having an event to bring in interest. Ann warned that she wouldn't advocate for something like that now. It is important to have a diversity of funders. The organization should make the rounds to professional organizations to ask for support to help position it for the future. The first meeting should be about asking for counsel. John Killacky at the San Francisco Foundation would be a good person to go to. Roger mentioned Sonia Sheridan as a potential funder and Tom Linehan as someone who could put us in touch with other funders. Ann suggested putting together a "case statement" to approach people like that. A non-profit organization should be engaging its donors to help create its future (strategic plan, etc.). When asking for support, it's best to start out not sounding dire but urgent. Silicon Valley is looking at leverage all the time. Individual donors are the most important funders.

Next steps: The board should begin to engage individuals that Roger has identified and put together a short document on what we've done, where we want to be, etc. (Ann will send us an example). Tami, Meredith and Marcia will work on it the document and will provide a rough draft by Wednesday 1/6. Jerry will send a follow up report within the next two weeks. Greg wants the board to figure out a buy-in that would bring in the big donations. Ann suggested letting the organization's future professionals figure that out and should also think about asking for something bigger than \$5,000. This is our chance to describe our situation, but more important our potential. If we can think of five people to contribute a quarter million within the next 2½ years that should be our main focus. Ann said that a big donor does not necessarily care about recognition, instead they are more interested in a unique experience in exchange for their donation. Pat, Greg and Marcia will approach John Killacky for counsel. Greg also said we need to figure out how to hold international board meetings without the technology falling apart. Pat will meet with Ann to talk about fundraising ideas for Leonardo. Jerry invited feedback from everyone's experience at the

retreat. The next board meeting is scheduled for January 28th and a follow-up retreat meeting is scheduled for February 27th. Jim requested an email alias to be set up for the board to make internal communications easier.

Nina's International Network Initiative Discussion: Nina Czegledy was elected as LEF chair in 2007 with Victoria Vesna. During that time she took it upon herself to work on the international visibility of Leonardo. Her term is up as LEF co-chair but she would like to continue her work, maybe not quite in the same capacity, but in some way that the board agrees might be beneficial to the organization. She has organized 16 events in 13 countries with 700 academics. She has approached conference organizers and proposed events with them. These efforts did not bring in cash money. She would like to approach potential affiliate members through conferences although most international schools are not able to raise \$1000 like US schools are so she recommended offering a less expensive option. She wants ultimately to promote international visibility of the organization and wants to call it LINE (Leonardo International Network). She doesn't want to duplicate anything that any other Leonardo group is doing and will ask for approval from the Governing Board ahead of time. She thinks it will take two years to stabilize and would like to work with someone else who will be in a position to eventually take it over. Her efforts have amounted to several white papers and policy papers generated from workshops that happen within a conference. Melinda would like Nina to send around a list of all past events she has been involved in and would like a copy of her plan for approval noting that it sounds fundable. Greg cautioned that the board should consider the extent of its liability, that it needs to think about what could possibly go wrong and how much the board want to be liable for it. Nina has organized an event for ISEA 2010 (in August) so she would like the board to approve her plans before then, if possible.

End time: 5pm