



Oregon Cultural Trust Special Board Meeting Minutes

October 16, 2025

Virtual

Board Members Present: Sean Andries, Chair; George Kramer, Vice-Chair; Deb Schaller; Gayle Yamasaki; Niki Price; Amber Faist

Board Members Absent: Gustavo Morales; Senator Bill Hansell, Representative John Lively; Nathali Johnson; Berenice Jones-Cenano; Myong-Hui Murphy

Staff Present: Kristi Arrington, Administrative Assistant; Raissa Fleming, Trust Assistant; Liora Sponko, Senior Program Manager; Aili Schreiner Cultural Trust Manager

Others Present: Watson Creative team; Dana Turell, Turell Group

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 AM. Introductions were made, and a new board member was welcomed, with voting privileges beginning November 1.

Approve Minutes

At 9:10 AM, the minutes from the August 21, 2025 meeting were reviewed. A correction was noted regarding committee membership, and the minutes were amended accordingly. A motion to approve the minutes was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.

Update from Chair: Legislative, Director Recruitment

At 9:15 AM, updates were provided on legislative matters and director recruitment. It was reported that in August, a vote was taken to continue supporting the merger bill, but the Arts voted not to move forward during the short session. Discussions remain ongoing about revisiting the matter in the long session. It was emphasized that renewing the cultural tax credit is a priority, though multiple requests to the legislature may reduce effectiveness. Consideration was given to deferring until 2028. No further discussion was raised. Regarding executive director recruitment, the process has been thorough, with 12–15 applicants interviewed initially, narrowed to seven for longer interviews, and then three finalists selected for further evaluation by staff, board members, commission members, and partners.

Confidence was expressed that a strong candidate will be chosen, with the goal of onboarding before the short session.

Partner Augmentation Grant

At 9:35 AM, discussion turned to the Partner Augmentation Grant. Applications and guidelines have been distributed, with the grant intended to support organizations experiencing significant funding losses that affect programming. As this is a new program, procedures are still being established. The board considered whether legislative approval would be required for each partner individually or collectively. Current fiscal year spending has exceeded limits, and additional requests are planned for the short session, including humanities and other grants. The board previously approved up to 4% administrative funding, with discussion on whether to request up to 5%. It was agreed that requesting the full 4% would be prudent, with any unused funds returning to the Trust. The board expressed consensus that the grant aligns with its intended purpose. A motion was made to approve the Oregon Humanities request, seconded, and passed unanimously. No motion was required for spending authority, as fiscal staff are aware and prepared to address this in the short session.

Senior Program Manager Report

At 9:55 AM, the Senior Program Manager provided a report. The September economic forecast projected a \$372 million deficit, prompting agencies to submit proposed budget reductions for general lottery and other funds, though federal funds were excluded. While this exercise may not result in a full 5% reduction for the current fiscal year, the legislature will consider adjustments during the short session. Concerns were raised about the impact on spending limitations, particularly given recent discussions about increasing them. Business Oregon is reviewing potential cuts, with submissions to the Legislative Fiscal Office expected soon. The board discussed whether the budget committee should be involved to ensure accountability and support. It was noted that while agencies typically submit 10% reduction exercises without board involvement, this process is more detailed than in the past. The Senior Program Manager will meet with leadership and submit documentation, aiming to minimize impacts on arts and trust programs.

Recruitment for the Communication Coordinator position is progressing, with an updated description posted November 3rd, interviews scheduled for early December, and a start date anticipated in January or February. The role includes fund development responsibilities in partnership with the board. Appreciation was expressed for staff and partners stepping up during this transition.

Campaign Presentation: Watson Creative

At 10:05 AM, a campaign presentation was delivered by Watson Creative. The team emphasized their research-based approach, focusing on commerce, culture, and community. Findings showed growth from \$4.5 million in 2019 to \$5.2 million in 2025, with digital awareness sustaining progress despite missed opportunities estimated at \$8–9 million. Marketing strategies include tailored digital ads, video, radio, and print directing audiences to donor landing pages. Donor acquisition and re-engagement campaigns have achieved a 45% completion rate, significantly above industry averages, and successfully

recaptured hundreds of lapsed donors. Donor churn has decreased steadily, from 32% loss in 2020–2021 to 15.5% in 2023–2024.

The team identified gaps, noting that traditional budgets should shift toward digital to increase visibility and optimize messaging. Approximately 65% of donors begin but do not complete the donation process, representing a major opportunity for recovery. Strengthening infrastructure, including modernized forms and donor management systems, was highlighted as essential. Delays in website development due to reliance on third-party platforms were noted as barriers. The board discussed donor reactivation strategies, emphasizing year-round engagement rather than seasonal pushes, and the importance of evergreen campaigns to maintain awareness.

Next steps include launching ads across digital and traditional media, with testing of landing pages underway and placements scheduled in magazines, radio, and playbills. The campaign is poised to begin within days. Frustrations were expressed regarding limitations imposed by current grant management and payment platforms, with suggestions to advocate for improved tools through Business Oregon and DAS. The presentation concluded with recommendations to strengthen donor infrastructure before scaling ad spending, ensuring sustainable growth and long-term campaign success.

Development Committee

Following a brief break at 10:30 AM, the meeting reconvened at 10:45 AM with the Development Committee report. The committee outlined three primary goals: increasing revenue to 5%, doubling corporate donors, and engaging ambassadors in 100 programs by year's end. Ambassador recruitment is progressing well, with approximately 20 individuals signed up and an orientation session scheduled for October 22nd. Ambassadors will be provided with materials such as brochures, slide decks, and social media templates to support outreach. Direct mail and email campaigns are being localized by county to increase relevance, and award winners are being asked to expand outreach through trackable links. Board members were reminded to ensure 100% participation by donating to their own organizations and matching the Trust.

The committee discussed strategies to double corporate donors, including board members selecting at least five current or lapsed donors from a provided list to contact using prepared scripts and templates. Eligibility for corporate donations was clarified, with S and C corporation filers eligible for the \$2,500 corporate donation, while individuals and couples may contribute at lower levels. Board members were encouraged to identify additional prospects beyond the list, cultivate relationships, and record their outreach commitments in a shared document. The timeline requires contacts to be made by the end of November, with materials distributed to support outreach. Board members were also reminded to make their own contributions before December 31st to ensure full board support.

Recruitment Committee

At 11:10 AM, the Recruitment Committee provided an update. Five applicants are currently in Workday, with efforts underway to expand the pool to ensure diverse regional and cultural representation.

Applications are due by November 11th, with recommendations to be submitted to the Governor's Office by December 5th. Four board members will term out at the end of the month, though they may remain in their seats until replacements are appointed during the short session in February. Discussion focused on how to categorize applicants to ensure diversity, with considerations including specialties, interests, cultural affiliation, and regional representation. It was noted that demographic data is redacted in applications, but cultural identity and regional location remain important factors. The committee emphasized the importance of broad outreach and equitable representation.

Partner Updates

At 11:30 AM, partner updates were shared. Oregon Humanities highlighted recent events, including a constitutional scholar presentation with statewide watch parties, discussions on public statues, and a podcast episode featuring an immigrant's experience from Russia to Oregon. A new co-tenant, a Native news organization, was welcomed. The Oregon Historical Society reported record fundraising success at its annual History Makers Award dinner, raising \$650,000 with over 400 attendees. The retirement of the Library Director after more than 30 years was noted, with a nationwide search completed and a successor beginning October 27th. From the arts perspective, uncertainty remains regarding federal funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Grants Committee will meet to consider potential impacts, with priorities including operational support. Awards have been distributed to nearly 400 groups statewide, along with arts learning grants and fellowships. Additional initiatives include the "50 for 50" campaign, a Travel Oregon video, and promotion of the Percent for Art program. Recruitment continues for three vacant seats on the Arts Commission, with pools shared between Arts and Cultural appointments.

Public Comment

At 11:50 AM, public comment was invited, but none was offered.

Closing Remarks, Adjourn

Closing remarks followed, and the meeting adjourned at 11:42 AM with expressions of gratitude to all participants.