

PROPOSED MICHIGAN FILM OFFICE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

April 12th, 2019

TechTown

Detroit, MI

1. Call to Order/Welcome from the Chairman

The meeting of the Michigan Film Office Advisory Council (MFOAC) was called to order at 1:03 p.m. by Council chairman Bill Ludwig. A quorum was present with the following Council members in attendance: Bill Ludwig, Rick Hert, Terry Terry, Dan Lemieux, Eric Kuiper, Joe Voss, Larry Fouts, and Skot Welch (on phone). Members excused: Andriy Pereklita, Brian Winn, Michael Mittelstaedt, Dori DePree, Niki Adams, and Tim Pietryga

Mr. Ludwig welcomed everyone to the April meeting of the Michigan Film Office Advisory Council. He also extended a welcome to the newest addition to the Council, Larry Fouts, pastor of Sweet Saviour Ministries. He asked everyone to introduce themselves, including the public in attendance, beginning with members of the Council.

2. Adopt Agenda

There was a motion by Mr. Lemieux to approve the Agenda; seconded by Mr. Hert; motion passed unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes from October 12, 2018 meeting

There was a motion by Mr. Kuiper to approve the minutes of the October 12, 2018 MFOAC meeting; motion passed unanimously.

4. Director's Report – Selam Ghirmai

Ms. Ghirmai extended thanks to the Freep Film Festival and TechTown for hosting the MFOAC meeting. She also welcomed Larry Fouts to the council.

Promotional Assets - She said in a continuation of the “Seamless Operations, Shameless Promotion,” mentality of the MFDMO, the office had been engaged in creating new promotional materials. The first she discussed is a flyer for filmmakers that outlines the services the MFDMO provides. The office also created a new promotional video for the Creative Chambers pilot program, which was included in the January 2019 newsletter. She played the video for the audience, which is comprised of a series of statements from Creative Chamber leads in the five pilot communities.

Creative Chamber Pilot Program - The above video was compiled from interviews with leads from Detroit, Grand Rapids, Marquette, Ann Arbor, and Traverse City at the annual Creative Chambers meeting in December 2018. The goal of the meeting was to share, facilitate, collaborate, and learn about state-wide trends. At the meeting, leads shared best practices, strategies, challenges, and successes. MEDC colleagues were invited to make connections between MEDC Business and Community Development staff and Creative Chamber leads.

Sponsorships – In October 2018: Fresh Coast Film Festival and Royal Starr Film Festival. November 2018: East Lansing Film Festival and Mosaic Video Experience. January 2019: Thunder Bay International Film Festival. February 2019: Central Michigan International Film Festival. March 2019: Ann Arbor Film Festival, which won USA Today's 10 Best Readers' Choice travel award contest. April 2019: Capital City

Film Festival, Freep Film Festival, and Michigan Student Film Festival. Preview for May 2019: Will be sponsoring Courageous Persuaders Awards, Detroit Filmmaker Awards, UICA Open Projector Night, and Cinetopia Film Festival.

Google Computer Science First – The MFDMO is hosting its fourth annual event to celebrate and encourage youth enrollment in Google’s Computer Science (CS) First clubs. The office rebranded to the Michigan Film & Digital Media Office in 2015. The MFDMO approached Google for ways to elevate digital media in Michigan. Google mentioned their free online CS First program, which the MFDMO began promoting to schools and educators across the state. The event will be held Friday, May 10 from 9:30am-12pm at the Gerald R. Ford Fieldhouse at the Grand Rapids Community College campus in Grand Rapids, MI. The format is a trade show, where tech professionals will set up interactive booths for students. Ms. Ghirmai welcomed the Council to attend.

Seed&Spark – The MFDMO is sponsoring a series of free workshops in Michigan this March and April where both veteran and budding filmmakers can attend crowdfunding training workshops, create and pitch their film projects and launch their crowdfunding campaigns via the web and the film festival circuit. The training will be conducted by Seed&Spark, an organization that connects budding and veteran filmmakers to audiences that are actively seeking independent content via a digital platform. Seed&Spark offers both crowdfunding (think Kickstarter) and subscription streaming (think Netflix) services. There will (tentatively) be twenty-three workshops nationwide that will include MFDMO branding. Currently scheduled Michigan workshops are: March 19 – Private event at Wayne State Univ (Detroit), March 20 – HYPE Teen Center (Detroit), April 12 – Women in Film Meetup @ FREEP FF/Funding Panel, and April 14 – Capital City FF (Lansing)

Film Festivals – MFDMO is working to move beyond the current, sponsorship-based relationships with film festivals to elevate and optimize their role as educational and business centers for filmmakers and points of interest for tourists. Last year, MFDMO joined the Film Festival Alliance (FFA) – first state film office to join this national organization; with the aim to foster collaboration and grow sustainable film festival ecosystem. The MFDMO is partnering with FFA to host the inaugural Michigan Film Festival Forum in conjunction w/ Hell’s Half Mile Film & Music Festival in Bay City, Michigan on September 26-29. The MFDMO will be hosting workshops and networking opportunities for festival organizers to share best practices from film festival peers. Ms. Ghirmai said MFOAC members are invited to attend and other possible engagement opportunities will likely be available. As to a timeline, Ms. Ghirmai anticipates save-the-dates will be sent out by the end of April, the MFDMO will share preview of the curriculum with MFOAC by the end of May, and if MFOAC members are interested in participating beyond attendance, she asked that they please advise as to topics of interest and role by mid-July.

Strategic Planning – The last Strategic Plan was completed in 2015. Ms. Ghirmai said the office is actively working towards a new Strategic Plan. The first step is research, and the MFDMO has engaged MEDC Corporate Research to conduct customer experience research as first step of its strategic planning process. The MEDC will be providing: a benchmarking memo which will discuss programs or services that other states have created to economically support Film & Creative Industries; a market research survey to assess the needs of Film & Creative Industry customers; in-depth qualitative data about Film Industry customers. Tentative timeline is July to complete the research, hoping to discuss at the next council meeting.

2019 MFOAC Meetings – July 30th in Traverse City at the TCFF and November 1st in Lansing

At the close of her report, Ms. Ghirmai received several questions:

Q. Is the Film Festival Alliance hosting their national meeting in Michigan?

A. The FFA holds round-tables such as this across the nation. This is the first one that will put Michigan in the circuit.

Q. How much was budgeted for the Creative Chamber in Detroit, and when does the funding cycle begin?

A. Approximately \$400,000 was allocated to Detroit. This is the third year and last year of the pilot. At this time there will be no additional funding, it is a pilot program, and currently a new budget has not been allocated.

Q. Follow-up on Creative Chamber: It is difficult to find whose projects were funded, where and how the activity has been promoted.

A. Because it's a pilot program, there has been a learning curve. Primary focus on building momentum at first with the 1st year spent figuring out advisory councils and other details. Public can get linked in to Chamber by going to MFDMO website and completing the Creative Chamber form to be added to email distribution list for their Chamber.

Q. With the changes in the executive staff (of Michigan), what is the word on incentives?

A. Ms. Ghirmai said that at this point, there is no indication of any activities around a bill and she hesitates to speculate. Audience member stated that there is PAC, and that they have begun drafting legislation that is in the hands of Rep. Wittenberg. However, Senate Majority Leader stated that "on a scale of 1-10, they can't get to 1 on film legislation." They are trying to mobilize people towards the goal of reinstating an incentive program when the time is right.

Q. Can we (MFOAC) go to the CS First Event?

A. Yes, and Tony Garcia of the MFDMO will share needed info.

5. Freep Film Festival Presentation – Steve Byrne, Executive Director (Freep Film Festival) and Arts & Entertainment Editor (Detroit Free Press)

Mr. Byrne thanked everyone for having him. Thanked MFDMO and Wayne State for their support. He explained that the Freep Film Festival is a documentary-focused festival hosted by the Detroit Free Press, and is in its 6th year. They have grown immensely in those six years. He highlighted some of the events and films at this year's festival. He noted they are often asked why the paper has a documentary film festival. The Detroit Free Press hosts the Freep Film Festival because of a strong connection between documentary and journalism. Documentary is taking place of long-form journalism. Also, a lot of times newspapers cover an event, but don't embrace the community. Freep let the Free Press embrace the community. Detroit Free Press had created documentaries before, and this served as a way to get their work out in a different way. They have won many national awards. Two films are in production, with stuff being shot right now. Also, after long battle, they will have national distribution for their documentary *12th and Clairmount* on Amazon and Roku. He then played a video highlighting some of the Free Press's documentary work. Mr. Byrne said in the next month or two people should see more of the Free Press's documentaries promoted. At the close of his presentation, Ms. Ghirmai asked Mr. Byrne to explain the Sustainability Conference that Freep would be hosting the next day. He it was an invitation-only event and said the hope was to brainstorm ideas on how to create sustainable careers in documentary work. Ms.

Anderson, who would also be there, said it was one of the most important discussions that needs to be had. She also noted that the Freep Film Festival people are able to get audiences for their films and get distribution for their films. Mr. Byrne said that several had gone on to get some form of distribution after premiering at Freep.

6. Wayne State University Presentation – Juanita Anderson, Area Head, Media Arts and Studies (Wayne State University Department of Education)

Ms. Anderson first introduced a film made by a WSU student, and said that the student got their first job offer out of this film. The film was *Alone Together*, directed and edited by Ali Nasser. She stated that in 2009 WSU's Media Arts and Studies program became one third of the Creative Film Alliance, which brought WSU students together with Michigan State University and University of Michigan students. It became a year-round production experience, with last one in 2013. Once film incentives were discontinued, schools reprioritized budgets and the three schools haven't reconvened since. But schools should still be concerned with how to grow film community in the state and prepare students for an ever-changing marketplace. Ms. Anderson said when planning curriculum there is concern with how to keep students here, instead of having them move to the west coast, and make sure they understand current technology in an ever-changing industry. She described the programs in the New Media Arts program. She said students are more and more concerned with developing their own artistic voices and gave some examples of student films that tackle issues that are personal to them. WSU's Master of Arts in New Media Arts is introducing a new concentration in Media Arts and Film Studies, which will include a one-year documentary sequence. A new STEM center is under construction and will include a virtual reality lab. She said she hopes to find ways to collaborate to keep students current and competitive. Ms. Anderson opened for questions, and Ms. Ghirmai asked how many students of the program stay in the state, and how many leave. Ms. Anderson said she didn't have metrics on that. An audience member (WSU alumnae from the program) said anecdotally that there were very few people she'd gone to school with that were still in the state and doing what they went to school for. Ms. Anderson said that the film incentives provided opportunities in the past, but that jobs had dried up since the discontinuation of the film incentives. Ms. Ghirmai commented that the MFDMO is still committed to creative entrepreneurs and said she would welcome a conversation to discuss how to connect WSU students to services the MFDMO offers, to which Ms. Anderson expressed interest. Audience member commented that Ms. Anderson is the 2019 Hyperion Award Winner which will be awarded on May 26.

7. Public Comments

Q: (To Mr. Byrne) How many people engaging in the Freep Film Festival are from metro-Detroit?

A: Most are metro-Detroit, but more and more are coming from around the state and surrounding states/areas (e.g. Illinois, Windsor, Toronto).

8. Old Business

There were no items discussed under Old Business.

9. New Business

There were no items discussed under New Business.

10. Adjournment

There being no further business, there was a motion by Mr. Terry to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Lemieux; motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:16p.m.