

2018-20 Executive Progress Report

Commonwealth of Virginia
Secretary of Education

Gunston Hall

At A Glance

To utilize fully the physical and scholarly resources of Gunston Hall to stimulate continuing public exploration of democratic ideals as first presented by George Mason in the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights.

Staffing 3 Salaried Employees, 0 Contracted Employees, 11 Authorized, and 21 Wage Employees.

Financials Budget FY 2019, \$0.84 million, 78.61% from the General Fund.

Trends Legend ↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease, → Steady

Key Perf Areas ↑ Increase visitation

Productivity Legend ↑ Improving, ↓ Worsening, → Maintaining

For more information on administrative key, and productivity measures, go to www.vaperforms.virginia.gov

Background and History

Agency Background Statement

In the 18th Century, Gunston Hall was a thriving 5,500-acre plantation located along the Potomac River in Fairfax County, Virginia. Its owner, George Mason IV (1725-1792), was a fourth generation Virginian, senior statesman, and author of seminal documents such as the Fairfax Resolves, the Virginia State Constitution, and most significantly the Virginia Declaration of Rights. In writing the Virginia Declaration of Rights, Mason was among the first to articulate, express, and call for such fundamental American liberties as religious tolerance and freedom of the press.

In accordance with a 1932 Deed of Gift from its last private owners, Eleanor and Louis Hertle, Gunston Hall was donated to the Commonwealth of Virginia with management and supervision of the property vested in the private Board of Regents of Gunston Hall, Inc. (the Board). The Board is a 501(c)(3) organization composed of members of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA). The NSCDA is a national unincorporated association of 44 Corporate State Societies that promote appreciation for the people, places and events that led to the formation and development of our country. It has been a leader in the field of historic preservation, restoration and the interpretation of historic sites since 1897.

Major Products and Services

Opening to the public in 1952, Gunston Hall is a 550-acre National Historic Landmark passionately fulfilling its mission *to stimulate the continuing public exploration of democratic ideals as first expressed by George Mason in the Virginia Declaration of Rights*. Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, the visitor center and mansion are open to the public 362 days a year. During a visit, guests are able to experience guided tour of the mansion; self-guided exhibits and tours of the reconstructed outbuildings (schoolhouse, kitchen, etc.), an active archaeology program, and hiking trails. The property is also a certified nature sanctuary and former Virginia Governor Terrence McAuliffe designated the site's extensive Bluebird Trail as a "Virginia Treasure".

Additionally, Gunston Hall is a *Blue Star Museum* and proudly offers free admission to all active duty military personnel and their families. As a participant in the national *Museums for All* Program, Gunston Hall also offers free admission to underserved audiences upon presentation of an Electronic Benefits Transfer card.

Finally, Gunston Hall provides for the stewardship of its resources through a significant commitment to historic preservation, collections management, and environmental conservation.

Customers

Customer Summary

In 2015 Gunston Hall completed comprehensive guest surveys of both daily visitors and school group visitors including teachers. Regarding daily visitors, this survey demonstrated 65% of guests were female, 57% were over the age of 55, 23% visited with at least one child, 87% identified themselves as white, 49% traveled to the site from within 60 miles, and 74% were first-time visitors. While the school group visitation demonstrated much greater diversity, since receiving and analyzing the above data, Gunston Hall has been proactively and successfully diversifying and increasing its guest demographics.

In FY18, Gunston Hall hosted 20,165 guests, including 6,435 school children, and since FY15 total visitation to Gunston Hall has increased 2%. This increase occurred within the context of the Agency's strategic decision to increase its offerings of complimentary admission, most notably to active duty military and their families and, as part of the national "Museums for All" Program, to those holding EBT cards.

Presently, Gunston Hall is planning to conduct further guest analysis in FY20 to better analyze the scope and scale of our efforts to expand and diversify our customer base.

Customer Table

Predefined Group	User Defined Group	Number Served Annually	Potential Number of Annual Customers	Projected Customer Trend
Adult	Adults	10,100	12,000	Increase
Child	Children (ages 6-18)	1,236	2,500	Increase
Child	Children (under 6)	413	500	Increase
Student	School Program participants	6,435	7,500	Increase
Aged	Senior guests	1,981	3,000	Increase

Finance and Performance Management

Finance

Financial Summary

Gunston Hall recognizes its organizational responsibility to be innovative and entrepreneurial in pursuit of financial sustainability. This commitment is articulated in the organization's strategic plan and is particularly important since Gunston Hall's general fund appropriation has declined significantly since 2007 while fixed operating costs (utilities, etc.) have increased during the same time period. Gunston Hall has sought to strategically overcome this dramatic shift in resources by increasing efficiencies, reducing expenditures where possible, and seeking additional private support. Although Gunston Hall continues to focus on educational excellence, site stewardship, and community engagement, the reality of this decline in Commonwealth support continues to challenge the organization's ability to expand its offerings to the public.

Fund Sources

Fund Code	Fund Name	FY 2019	FY 2020
0100	General Fund	\$509,989	\$510,582
0200	Special	\$175,184	\$175,588

Revenue Summary

Gunston Hall generates non-general fund revenue through site admissions. These funds directly support the operation of Gunston as a publicly accessible historic site.

Performance

Performance Highlights

One way Gunston Hall evaluates and measures performance is based on the number of guests served. In FY18, Gunston Hall served 20,165 guests including 6,435 school children. While this total reflects a 10% (2,273 guests) decrease versus FY17, since FY15 visitation has increased 2%. It is also important to note that in reviewing attendance at other historic sites and museums in VA and nationally, our decline in FY18 is comparable to others. While not ideal, this context is important in demonstrating that we are not an outlier. Finally, as was true for many comparable sites, weather once again impacted our visitation to a great deal this year. Most notably, extended closures associated with severe wind storms, snow on the days of major events like Christmastide, and significant flooding in our region all impacted our visitation.

Equally important, Gunston Hall evaluates and measures performance based on the impact and benefit we provide to those we serve. In support of doing so, we conduct evaluations of all our educational offerings and public programs. These surveys reveal and demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with the overall experience at Gunston Hall.

Selected Measures

Measure ID	Measure	Alternative Name	Estimated Trend
41714507.003.001	Follow all appropriate policies and procedures of the commonwealth.	Follow all appropriate policies and procedures of the commonwealth.	
M417AG12001	Annually increase total guests served.	Increase visitation	Improving

Key Risk Factors

In FY 2014 Gunston Hall adopted a strategic operating plan which articulated goals and opportunities specific to organizational advancement. This plan also identified potential challenges and risks which could hinder or prevent the successful achievement of this desired growth and expansion. These risks include declining public financial support, aging and failing infrastructure, a small staff, and the need to proactively and strategically align operations, educational offerings, and physical infrastructure with a rapidly evolving and increasingly diverse regional population in order to ensure relevance.

Gunston Hall is presently working to overcome these challenges in the following ways: 1) by diversifying its base of financial support and increasing the level of private financial support, 2) by seeking public and private funds for capital improvements, 3) by evaluating its organizational structure and adding privately funded staff, and 4) by collaboratively developing, designing, and implementing improvements to the site and our educational offerings which address the changing demographics of our region based on a series of community discussions and a comprehensive program of guest surveys.

An additional major risk factor, however, is outdated and deficient IT infrastructure and systems. While the Agency received funding in FY19 and FY20 to help address these deficiencies, staying current with the rapid pace of technological innovation remains a risk factor for the overall organization.

Agency Statistics

Statistics Summary

Statistics Table

Description Value

Management Discussion

General Information About Ongoing Status of Agency

Gunston Hall will continue implementing its strategic operating plan and focusing on fulfilling its mission of stimulating the continuing exploration of democratic ideals as first expressed by George Mason in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Fundamental to this work is becoming a national and international resource for the study of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, enhancing educational offerings, sustaining an acclaimed reputation, diversifying our base of financial support, preserving our cultural and natural resources, and facilitating research and collections based experiences.

As a major component of this effort, Gunston Hall will also continue implementing its Campus Master Plan. Adopted in FY17, the Campus Master Plan will shape the next twenty years of improvements at Gunston Hall and it is based on four core goals, which are:

- Enlarge and enhance the historic core.
- Conserve the site’s distinctive landscapes and natural resources.
- Increase access to educational and recreational opportunities throughout the site
- Implement experiences focusing on youth and provide facilities in response to their needs.

The restoration of the George Mason’s Riverside Garden is the first capital project being undertaken in the furtherance of the Campus Master Plan.

Scheduled to break ground in 2018, once complete in 2019, the Garden will enhance the authenticity of the site, reveal much about the innovative and imaginative mind of Mason, demonstrate the humanity and relationships of those living and working at Gunston Hall, and provide an educational setting as distinctive as Mason's design for the signature landscape feature of his home—*The Home of American Rights*.

Furthermore, Gunston Hall has initiated a dedicated effort to better interpret the history of the African American and enslaved population's experience at Gunston Hall through research and archeology. This efforts includes the broadening and enhancement of partnerships and collaborations with other educational institutions such as George Mason University. Most notably, in 2017 Gunston Hall debuted a critically acclaimed theatrical performance exploring Mason's legacy as one who articulated "that all men are born equally free...", but who also enslaved over 100 individuals.

Additionally, in line with stated measures, Gunston Hall is now free to all active duty military and their families. This important determination has increased the participation of military families at Gunston Hall and enhanced collaborations with Fort Belvoir and the neighboring military community. This action has also, along with new collaborations with Fairfax County Public Schools and the development of new school aged programming, expanded opportunities for at-risk populations. A critically important component of achieving this measure and the organization's new master plan is the addition of a daily pre-school at Gunston Hall, a project that is also in the planning stages. Another associated impact and outcome of this effort is the expansion of programs for teachers and Gunston Hall has doubled the number of programmatic opportunities for teachers in the last year.

Finally, with Capital Fund and Maintenance Reserve Fund support from the Commonwealth and private support from the community, Gunston Hall is renovating its museum / visitor center and completing significant repairs to the mansion and other cultural resources. These repairs to the mansion include the installation of a new roof, exterior painting and wood restoration, the replacement of outdated HVAC systems at the mansion, securing a connection to the municipal water system, and preliminary planning for a new security and fire suppression system at the mansion. These efforts have also included enhanced landscape management practices and currently Gunston Hall is working landscape architects, horticulturalists, and environmental specialists to restore historic landscapes at Gunston Hall, improve access to trails, and support watershed stewardship.

Collectively, these efforts are intended and will support the future success and sustainability of Gunston Hall.

Information Technology

Gunston Hall's IT infrastructure is outdated, inefficient, and ineffective. In particular, given its somewhat rural and isolated location, connectivity is a challenge. This challenge is heightened by aging physical infrastructure at Gunston Hall. This lack of consistent and comprehensive connectivity hinders the development of digital educational experiences and the operational efficiency of the organization. Finally, increasing IT costs and fees for current or additional services challenge an already tight operating budget.

Fortunately, Gunston Hall received funding in FY19 and FY20 for some much needed enhancements to the Agency's IT infrastructure. Ensuring that future investments in the Agency's ability to remain current and in alignment with the rapid pace of technological innovation, however, remains a critical priority.

Workforce Development

Gunston Hall boasts a dedicated workforce who are passionate about the organization and its mission. The team is composed of a combination of experienced, skilled, long-tenured employees and talented, eager, emerging professionals. This balance serves the organization well and offers varied perspectives and viewpoints of value to the organization's efforts.

The Gunston Hall team is small and this reality poses operational challenges. These challenges are particularly acute in the areas of facilities and grounds (550 acres and multiple buildings), finance (complex budget and importance of a segregation of duties), and education (core mission and purpose). Accordingly, duties and responsibilities are spread across a variety of positions, making cross-training, communication, and collaboration very important and limiting time available for new initiatives. As reflected in the Agency's succession plan, the high percentage of wage employees fulfilling mission critical functions compounds the challenges reflected above.

While retention is a strength, recruitment represents an additional challenge. The Northern Virginia market is highly competitive, has low unemployment, a transient population, a high cost of living, and traffic congestion. Although amenities abound for current and potential residents, these factors frequently combine to limit the talent pool available and able to work at Gunston Hall. Furthermore, despite overall high job satisfaction among the team, salaries are on average lower than our competitors and other comparable institutions. This is particularly true for entry and mid-level roles.

At present, Gunston Hall is refining its organizational structure and updating job descriptions and expectations. Gunston Hall is also seeking private support for an enhanced program of continuing education and professional development. These efforts are part of an overall strategy designed to support the continuing development of the team.

Physical Plant

Gunston Hall encompasses 554 acres along the Potomac River, three cemeteries, and seventeen buildings of varying ages including, most importantly, Gunston Hall itself which was built by George Mason in 1755. The property also features multiple archeological sites ranging from pre-history to the twentieth century. Accordingly, management of the physical plant is a significant investment and responsibility. As such, stewardship of the site's cultural resources is the top priority, as is the conservation of the site's natural resources.

Overall, Gunston Hall's physical plant is aging and failing in many areas, particularly relating to mechanical systems, and requires a significant investment of time and repair funds to maintain functionality. Gunston Hall is addressing some of these challenges by renovating its visitor center and museum and is also completing several important historic preservation projects on the mansion .
