AASHE Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Date: August 21, 2026
Time: 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM ET
Location: Virtual

Attendance (X – present; R – regrets; A – absent):

Board

X	Daryl Pierson	R	Kim Hankins (regrets)
R	Rania Assariotaki (regrets)	X	Sophia Agtarap
X	Jillian Buckholz (virtual)	X	Leonie Lado
X	Kristin Parineh	X	Chris Ewing
X	Francois Miller	X	Yasmin Mahmoud
X	John Madden	X	Joseli Macedo
X	Elizabeth Swiman	X	Greg (G.L.) Genco

Management & Guests

X	Meghan Fay Zahniser (Executive Director)

1. Opening Round

Meghan Fay Zahniser facilitated the opening round, inviting board members to share a summer highlight. Members shared a range of personal and professional updates, reinforcing a collegial tone ahead of the meeting.

2. Consent Agenda

Daryl Pierson noted that Rania Assariotaki and Kim Hankins were absent with advance notification.

Daryl Pierson confirmed that all members had access to the draft June 2026 Board Meeting Minutes and the proposed agenda.

Motion: Approve Consent Agenda
Moved: Chris Ewing
Seconded: John Madden
Vote: Approved unanimously.

3. Executive Director Update

Meghan Fay Zahniser provided an update on organizational financial performance, staffing, and program activity.

3.1 Financial Overview

- Conference registration continues to climb, with the next pricing tier taking effect after September 11.
- Q2 financial statements reflect membership revenue affected by deferred revenue recognition, adjusted twice yearly consistent with YPTC guidance.

- STARS subscription revenue remains flat, while course revenue is down, reflecting the softer second-year performance of the Campus Decarbonization Academy.
- The investment account balance is approximately $778,000, closer than desired to the $550,000 required reserves floor.
- A conference venue expense of approximately $64,000 was incurred in March but we're seeking lower (or no) cost venues moving forward.

3.2 Staffing and Operational Adjustments

- Total staff has been reduced to nine. The membership operations coordinator role was eliminated, reflecting redundancy created by the new account management system and reduced justification for two full-time membership staff amid membership decline.
- The finance function has been outsourced to YPTC for the remainder of the year.
- A long-tenured staff member will be departing at year-end; responsibilities will be redistributed or associated programs adjusted.

3.3 Program Updates

- The Campus Decarbonization Academy has been renamed the Campus Energy Transformation Academy to broaden its appeal. Two sponsors have been confirmed, with registration launching in September.
- The promotional partner strategy for the conference continues to gain traction, with signatories including AACC, state college and university associations, and student affairs, housing, and procurement groups.
- A new STARS cohort for HBCUs is underway, led by Howard University, alongside continued international STARS recruitment.
- A grant application has been submitted.

3.4 Membership Meeting and Conference Logistics

- The membership meeting will move to a virtual format following the conference, due to venue timing constraints and to broaden member reach.
- A member survey is planned for November, aligned with staff capacity.

3.5 Request for Board Member Support

- Board members are requested to promote the conference with template language provided in the Executive Director report.
- Board members are also requested to share the sponsorship & exhibitor prospectus with businesses to recruit more business engagement in the conference as well as membership with a new document to encourage membership.

4. Committee Updates & Discussion

4.1 Executive Committee

Daryl Pierson provided an update. Key discussion points included:

- The Executive Committee met several times over the summer, focusing on year-end revenue and expenditure outlook and forward-looking restructuring options.
- Reputational and community morale considerations were discussed alongside organizational financial risk.
- Board members were asked to prepare a personal, thoughtful note of appreciation for each staff member ahead of the conference.
- Daryl Pierson is available Friday mornings, 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM PT, for board members to connect directly.

4.2 Finance & Fundraising Committee

Kristin Parineh provided an update. Key discussion points included:

- The updated Investment Policy Statement was presented for approval. The revision removes language that conflicted with previously approved financial policies and does not introduce substantive new changes.

Motion: Approve updated Investment Policy Statement

Moved: Francois Miller

Seconded: Jillian Buckholz

Vote: Approved.

- The Board previously approved continued exploration of a budget-based dues structure and an individual membership tier. Kristin Parineh is seeking informal board feedback on whether to continue this work, given the current organizational capacity and climate. Full discussion is deferred to the October board meeting.

4.3 Governance Committee

Francois Miller provided an update. Key discussion points included:

- The board election and appointment timeline was reviewed: call for applications by the end of September, submission deadline mid-October, election results known by November 10, and board confirmation at the November 20 board meeting.
- Four seats will be filled this cycle, as Rania Assariotaki, Francois Miller, John Madden, and Leonie Lado term out at the end of 2026. At least 50 percent of board members must be elected by membership, which limits the number of appointed seats.
- Elizabeth Swiman raised the importance of recruiting board members with expertise outside sustainability, such as fundraising and investment, to help address current strategic challenges.
- With three Canadian members and one international member exiting the board simultaneously, international representation will be a factor in upcoming appointments.
- A bylaw amendment establishing a presidential and vice presidential succession plan was presented for approval. The amendment addresses circumstances in which a vice president's term ends before the vice president assumes the presidency. Under the new language, vice presidential candidates must have at least two years remaining on their term; if the vice president is unable to assume the presidency, the outgoing president may serve a second consecutive one-year term, subject to board approval; and no president may serve more than three consecutive years.

Motion: Approve bylaw amendment on presidential and vice presidential succession
Moved: Joseli Macedo
Seconded: John Madden
Vote: Approved.

- The updated Board Orientation Manual, led by Jillian Buckholz, is nearing completion. The update clarifies that AASHE's incorporation in Massachusetts requires the titles “president” and “vice president” in the bylaws, while “chair” and “vice chair” are used operationally and are interchangeable in practice. Outdated terminology is also being updated for consistency.

4.4 International Task Force

In Rania Assariotaki's absence, it was noted that the task force has not met since the last board meeting. Discussion of revenue generation opportunities will resume ahead of the next meeting, with an update to follow from Rania Assariotaki.

5. Financial Risks and 2027 Planning Considerations

The Board discussed longer-term financial risk and options under consideration for year-end and 2027 planning. Key discussion points included:

- AASHE's revenue model, built on membership and professional development, is directly exposed to the current political and budgetary climate in higher education.
- Further operational cost reductions carry risk to program quality and member value.
- Items under active consideration include replacing YPTC with a lower-cost financial consultant, restructuring dues and adding an individual membership tier, reducing staff benefits, outsourcing additional functions, moving the investment relationship away from Bernstein, given increasingly difficult to justify management fees, and potential leadership compensation adjustments, subject to board approval.
- A contract has been signed for the 2027 conference at the Portland Hilton, with a cancellation cost of approximately $14,000. The October board retreat in Baltimore will serve as the decision point on whether to proceed with an in-person conference, with a virtual format remaining an option if needed.
- Kristin Parineh flagged a discrepancy between the membership revenue projection presented in the meeting materials and the corresponding budget projection. Meghan Fay Zahniser will follow up with the full Board.

6. Closing Remarks

Daryl Pierson provided closing remarks. Most board members have confirmed they will attend the conference in person; Joseli Macedo may be unable to attend. Jillian Buckholz will join the Friday board meeting virtually and will be on-site Sunday through Tuesday. Board members were asked to actively promote conference registration, sponsorship, and exhibiting opportunities within their networks.

Board members were thanked for their continued engagement and contributions to committee work and organizational priorities.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following the Board Chair's closing remarks. Next meeting: Saturday, October 3, 2026, Baltimore Inner Harbor, Marshall Room.