AASHE Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Date: June 12, 2026
Time: 11:30 AM ET
Location: Virtual

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

Board

x	Daryl Pierson		x	Greg (G.L.) Genco
x	Rania Assariotaki		x	Kim Hankins
x	Jillian Buckholz		x	Sophia Agtarap
x	Kristin Parineh		x	Léonie Lado
x	François Miller		x	Chris Ewing
x	John Madden		R	Yasmin Mansour
x	Elizabeth Swiman		R	Joseli Macedo

Management & Guests

x	Meghan Fay Zahniser (Executive Director)

1. Opening Round and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Daryl Pierson. Meghan Fay Zahniser facilitated the opening round, inviting board members to share something they had done to support AASHE since the last meeting.

The Executive Director noted additional external engagement, including new connections with peer associations and international partners, as well as an invitation to contribute to a thought leadership series later in the summer.

2. Consent Agenda, Approval of April 2026 Minutes

Daryl Pierson confirmed that all members had access to the April Board Meeting Minutes, the Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, and the proposed agenda.

Motion: Approve the April Board Meeting Minutes and the June 12, 2026 Agenda
Moved: Jillian Buckholz
Seconded: John Madden
Vote: Approved unanimously.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes were shared for informational purposes. No action was required.

3. Executive Director Update

Meghan Fay Zahniser provided an update on organizational performance, operations, and key initiatives. Daryl Pierson reminded members to hold questions during the update to support efficient use of time and to flag items in the chat for follow-up.

3.1 Financial and Operational Updates

- The organization absorbed a significant increase in health insurance costs at renewal, well above the amount typically budgeted. Staff are working with benefits providers to identify potential savings, with plan adjustments anticipated for the following year.
- The Q1 financial report, investment report, and audit materials were shared with the Board in late April. A more detailed mid-year financial review (Q2) will follow the meeting with YPTC, the ED and Treasurer scheduled for July 16.
- A previously discussed update to the employee handbook took effect, capping vacation payout for departing staff at two weeks.
- Transition to the new account management system continues to progress, with fewer outstanding issues and additional IT support being added to accelerate improvements.

3.2 Membership, Marketing, and Communications

- Membership is tracking slightly behind budget projections, though not at an alarming level. A fuller assessment will be available after Q2.
- Recruitment and retention campaigns are underway, including outreach to lapsed members and targeted outreach to institutions in the conference host region. Board members will be invited to support the recruitment of select institutions using a provided template.
- The strategic plan and racial equity and social justice resources were placed behind a member login in response to member feedback, and an updated value proposition one-pager was created to help members articulate the value of membership.
- A summer sustainability stories blog series is in development, and a new back-to-school member resource toolkit is planned for August. A review of member benefits is also anticipated.

3.3 Programs, Conference, and STARS

- The Sustainability Education Forum saw strong, increased attendance over last year. Webinar schedules for the remainder of the year and early next year have been published, and two new Centers for Sustainability Across the Curriculum were added.
- Conference acceptances and the full schedule are expected by the end of the month, with an early bird registration deadline of July 10 and Johns Hopkins University serving as a host institution. Host institution sponsorship is significantly below the prior year.
- STARS activity continues, with the Sustainable Campus Index launch planned for September. Development of the next STARS version has slowed following a staff transition. Two STARS workshops were held in May.
- Results of the periodic staffing survey are forthcoming and will be accompanied by a webinar, with attention to how the findings are framed.

3.4 Board Support Requests

Board members were encouraged to support AASHE by:

- Encouraging colleagues to register for the conference before the early bird deadline.
- Sharing conference sponsorship and host institution opportunities.
- Supporting membership recruitment of identified institutions.
- Amplifying organizational content and program announcements.

4. Committee Updates & Discussion

4.1 Executive Committee

Daryl Pierson reported on the recent Executive Committee meeting, which focused on the role of board committees in advancing organizational strategy. Drawing on takeaways from a recent CHEMA convening, the committee discussed organizational risk, alignment with the strategic plan, and opportunities for collaboration. A central outcome was the recommendation that each committee integrate revenue generation as a consistent consideration across its work.

4.2 Finance & Fundraising Committee

Kristin Parineh thanked the finance committee for its work and provided an update covering the Q1 financial report, proposed investment policy changes, and revised financial policies.

Key discussion points included:

- AASHE maintains a main operating account and an investment account. Over the past several years, the investment account has declined substantially, driven primarily by withdrawals to support operations rather than by market performance, which has remained positive.
- An additional withdrawal is anticipated in July. The committee noted that withdrawals have been made from funds held above the organization's required reserves.
- Q1 results reflected declines across several membership and STARS categories relative to the prior year, reinforcing the importance of revenue generation. Q2 results will be available in July.
- Board members requested more regular and proactive reporting on investment withdrawals to strengthen the Board's strategic oversight, and discussed the need to pair revenue diversification with a cost mitigation strategy. The discussion recognized post-pandemic conditions and external pressures on higher education as contributing factors.

The committee presented proposed changes to the Investment Policy Statement that reflect a modest reallocation between diversified and risk-mitigating assets. After reviewing options regarding the organization's current investment manager and associated fees, the committee recommended maintaining the current investment approach for the year and reevaluating at year-end.

The committee also presented revised financial policies, reduced from approximately 80 pages to 39, and updated for compliance and stronger internal controls. Notable changes included:

- Dual approval by the Executive Director and Treasurer for any policy exceptions.
- A conflict of interest signing requirement extended to the Executive Director.
- Treasurer approval required for filing tax extensions.
- New emergency authorization procedures and provisions for the Executive Director's absence.
- Combination of the finance and audit functions into a single committee while annual revenue remains under $2 million.
- New responsibilities for monitoring fee structures against market conditions and inflation.
- An increased equipment capitalization threshold of $2,500.
- Board approval required for vendors or expenses totaling $100,000 or more within a 24-month period, and for multi-year contracts.
- Competitive bid requirements for contracts over $25,000, with recurring high-value vendors rebid every four years.

- Investment-to-operating transfer controls maintain a required reserve of $550,000, with transfers reported to the finance committee and board approval required for any transfer that would reduce the reserve below that threshold.

Motion: Approve the Investment Policy Statement and the revised Financial Policies
Moved: John Madden
Seconded: Kim Hankins
Vote: Approved unanimously.

4.3 Governance Committee

François Miller provided an update on the governance committee's recent work.

Key discussion points included:

- Aligning committee efforts with the strategic plan and integrating revenue generation into board renewal planning.
- Advancing the continuity plan for the student board member role, with members invited to identify potential student candidates from their institutions.
- Reviewing potential alternatives to Robert's Rules of Order, with a concrete proposal anticipated at the next meeting.
- Building the calendar for the next board election and appointment cycle, while noting upcoming board transitions in the coming year.

4.4 International Task Force

Rania Assariotaki provided an update on the task force's work, reviewed through the lens of revenue generation.

Key discussion points included:

- Exploring regional engagement models, including scaling regional nodes to serve the distinct needs of international institutions.
- Mapping and prioritizing institutions within selected pilot regions rather than pursuing all regions simultaneously.
- Building awareness of AASHE's sustainability solutions and programs among international audiences.
- Developing a mentoring hub or community of practice for international members, building on the existing mentorship model and the recognized value of STARS.

5. Strategic Foresight Discussion

Daryl Pierson introduced a strategic foresight discussion informed by takeaways from the recent CHEMA convening, including consideration of organizational, financial, and reputational risk. The discussion invited members to anticipate future challenges and opportunities facing the organization and the higher education sustainability sector.

Members engaged through a series of live polling questions addressing practices that are declining, established and accepted practices, emerging ideas over a five-year horizon, and issues to consider over a ten-year horizon.

Key discussion points included:

- Sustainability in higher education is not diminishing, but the structure and positioning of sustainability roles are shifting, including a trend toward distributed rather than centralized roles.

- The role of the sustainability professional continues to evolve, with implications for how the organization serves its members.
- Members were encouraged to approach decisions with a focus on the long-term interests of the organization, consistent with their fiduciary responsibility.

Learnings from the discussion will be synthesized and shared in upcoming meetings to inform strategic planning.

6. Closing Remarks

Daryl Pierson thanked the Executive Director and committee members for their work and emphasized the importance of prioritizing the organization's long-term strength. Members were encouraged to engage thoroughly with board materials and committee work and to undertake an activity in support of the organization ahead of the next meeting and the upcoming conference.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following the Board Chair's closing remarks. Next meeting: Friday, August 21, 11:30am – 1pm Eastern.