



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

# Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Meeting Minutes

September 18, 2025  
2:45 p – 3:45 p

Florida Polytechnic University  
Virtual via Microsoft Teams

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Beth Kigel called the Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee meeting to order at 2:45 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Kristen Wharton called the roll: Committee Chair Beth Kigel, Committee Vice Chair Sumanth Neelam, Trustee Eliot Peace, Trustee Colby Manrodt, and Trustee Jesse Panuccio were present (Quorum).

Committee members not present: n/a

Other Trustees Present: Trustee Edwar Romero-Ramirez and Trustee Sid Theis

Staff Present: President Devin Stephenson, Provost Brad Thiessen, Dr. Tanner McKnight, David Fugett, David Blanton, Cole Allen, Kelli Stargel, Melaine Schmiz, and Kristen Wharton

III. Public Comment

There were no requests received for public comment.

IV. Charter

Committee Chair Beth Kigel reviewed the draft Committee Charter. Its purpose states:

The Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Trustees to support the University's mission and long-term success by providing strategic guidance and informed recommendations regarding the University's key strategic initiatives, external partnerships, and institutional reputation. The Committee will assist the Board in identifying emerging opportunities and challenges in higher education, evaluating long-range plans, and strengthening the University's engagement with government, industry, alumni, and the broader community.

There was no further discussion on this item.

**Trustee Sumanth Neelam made a motion to recommend approval of the Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee Charter to the Board of Trustees. Trustee Jesse Panuccio seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

V. Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Report

Kelli Stargel, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, Development, and External Relations, provided Committee members with an overview of recent activities within her division. Her presentation focused on three key areas of external engagement:

1. Economic Development
2. Government and International Relations
3. Industry Partnerships

She provided representative examples within each category and introduced a four-stage engagement model to guide relationship development and strategic discussions:

1. Introduction – Initial contact initiated by the Florida Poly team.
2. Exploration – Follow-up meetings to identify potential areas of synergy.
3. Engagement – Concrete discussions leading to a preliminary plan for collaboration.
4. Partnership – Formal agreement executed between the University and the external entity.

Stargel illustrated how various companies currently align within these stages and described Florida Poly's efforts to advance each relationship strategically. She also introduced a proposed framework to guide involvement by University leadership and the Board of Trustees. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of discretion in public meetings, noting the need to withhold company names during early-stage discussions.

Chair Kigel added that the University's strategic plan serves as the guiding standard—or “litmus test”—for all external engagements. Even in the earliest stages of relationship-building, the administration ensures alignment with institutional goals and priorities.

VI. 2024-2026 Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Work Plan

Chair Kigel stated the new Committee needs to establish a Work Plan for the fiscal year. The Plan establishes the specific topics that will be discussed at each meeting throughout the year.

**Trustee Colby Manrodt motioned to approve the 2025-2026 Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee Work Plan. Trustee Sumanth Neelam seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

IX. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Kristen Wharton

Corporate Secretary to the Board of Trustees