



Minutes for SCITT Governing Board Meeting
5/14/2025 11:00 AM - 11:55 AM
Zoom only, <https://csupueblo.zoom.us/j/9123456789>

Members:

Ms. Gonzales (Chair), Ms. Ann Rajewski (Vice Chair)
Dr. Dave Lehmpuhl, Ms. Kat Papenbrock, Ms. Lisa Staes, Mr. Nick Hinrichsen (absent), Mr. Ruben Pena, Ms. Sara Cassidy, Dr. Steve Cohn, Ms. Wendy Martinez (absent) (alphabetically).

SCITT Director: Dr. Md Rashad Islam

Invited Guests: Mr. Michael McMaster, Mr. Armando Valdez, Dr. Elena Sidorova, Dr. Saqib Gulzar.

The meeting was called to order at 11:01 am by Dr. Islam.

1) Approval of Meeting Minutes for 2025/01/29

- Dr. Islam shared the January 29th minutes so that all could see it on the Zoom.
- Ms. Gonzales asked if there were any comments or changes that needed to be made to.
- Ann pointed out a spelling error in the minutes. The word "collision" was missing an "i".
- Dr. Islam corrected it on the spot.
- A motion to approve the minutes with the noted spelling correction was made by Ms. Gonzales, seconded by Mr. Pena and Ms. Staes, and got approved unanimously.

2) Fiscal year 2026 Budget

Dr. Islam explained the fiscal year 2026 budget, noting that a projected about \$300,000 deficit was contingent on whether three pending grants are secured. The board discussed how this financial uncertainty was managed, the institution's indirect cost recovery procedures, and other potential revenue streams. The board discussed several points:

- Faculty salaries: The budget includes salaries for three faculty members: Dr. Islam, Dr. Saqib Gulzar, and Dr. Elena Siderova. Dr. Islam noted that his salary, currently capped at \$140,000, may increase due to an equity adjustment from the university.
- Grant uncertainty: The budget accounted for possible summer breaks for some faculty, but this was dependent on receiving new grants. A Department of Labor grant was progressing well, but two hydrogen grants (one from the Federal Highway Administration and one from the Federal Railroad Administration) are currently on waiting.
- Grant-funded positions: Dr. Islam explained that if the hydrogen grants are secured, they would need to hire new faculty with specific expertise (e.g., hydrogen, artificial

intelligence). The budget currently reflects potential costs for these hires, but the timing was uncertain.

- Hiring preparations: Despite the uncertainty around grant funding, the recruitment process for new faculty has already begun. This proactive approach aims to ensure that they can quickly hire new staff if the grants are released.
- Color-coding in the budget: Dr. Islam clarified the color-coding system used in the budget:
 - Blue and Green: For in-house, internal grants.
 - Gray: For grants that are progressing but with an uncertain timeline.
- Contract revenue: Board members sought clarification on how to interpret the contract revenue, with one suggesting a specific column range for summing up the figures
- Contingent costs: A potential deficit of over \$300,000 was shown in the budget, but Dr. Islam explained this would only occur if certain pending grants are received. If the grants do not come through, the associated costs would not be incurred, mitigating the financial risk.
- Personnel planning: Two hydrogen grants, one from the Federal Highway and another from the Federal Railroad, are on waiting. While the associated faculty have been included in the budget, they would only be hired if the grants are funded. Job postings for these roles have already been created to expedite hiring once the grants are released.
- University backstop: A board member observed that the staff salaries are a potential drain on the budget if grants don't come through. Dr. Islam affirmed that if the money for the pending grants does not come in, the university would cover the staff salaries through its "E&G" fund.
- Indirect cost negotiation strategy: Ms. Staes questioned the institution's Indirect cost rate, noting that their own college has negotiated higher returns with their sponsor research office. Dr. Islam explained that the current Indirect cost rate was low (48% of salary and wages), significantly less than the standard industry practice of charging a percentage of total direct costs.
- Potential for improvement: Dr. Islam acknowledged that this was a "good point" and that negotiating a higher indirect rate could be a valuable future revenue source, though it would not be a significant factor in the immediate fiscal year.

Future revenue and contracts

- Fixed-price contract rollovers: Ms. Staes asked about fixed-price contract rollovers, another potential revenue source. In such contracts, any unspent funds remaining at the end of the contract can be kept by the institution.
- Long-term potential: While this was not yet a significant factor for the institution, it was identified as a potential future revenue source for grants that are already underway, such as those with the state Department of Transportation. The board also discussed potential risks if costs exceed the initial budget on such contracts.

Final approval

- Motion and vote: A motion to approve the budget for fiscal year 2026 was made by Ms. Gonzales, and seconded by Ms. Rajewski and Mr. Pena.
- Unanimous approval: The motion was unanimously approved by the board.

3) Update/discuss the activities

In an update on ongoing activities, Dr. Islam outlined recent progress and future plans, including newly funded grants, student programs, upcoming proposals, and academic initiatives.

Ongoing research and new grants:

- New grant: The newest funded grant is a CRISI railway workforce development grant, for which the SCITT is a subcontractor for the University of South Florida.
- Funded grants: Three other grants are ongoing in the region.
- Pending grants:
 - A hydrogen grant from the Federal Highway Administration was contracted but currently paused.
 - A grant from the Department of Labor is progressing well and expected to be funded within weeks.
 - A Federal Railroad Administration grant has been awarded but pending funding and the assignment of a new project manager, Melissa Shurland, as confirmed by Mr. Pena.

Educational and outreach programs:

- Middle school program: The Friday-after-school program for middle schoolers is underway, with 19 students in the first cohort and all 32 applicants accepted for the upcoming summer session. The program is free for students, including meals and snacks.
- High school program: High school students would participate in a new "100-level" class on railway basics and safety. Three students are currently registered for the course.
- Graduate program: A CSU Pueblo graduate student has begun a master's thesis on railway transition safety as part of the program.

Academic development:

- Approved certificate: The undergraduate certificate in transportation engineering has been approved and would launch in fall 2025.
- In-progress approvals: The following programs have passed the university's curriculum board and are awaiting approval from the university system's board of governors:
 - A graduate certificate in transportation.
 - A master's in civil engineering.
 - A "3+2" program for civil engineering undergraduates to earn a master's degree.

Upcoming conference

- Annual event: An annual symposium is required by a SCITT House Bill. The upcoming SCTC 2025 conference is themed on climate change and extreme weather events related to railway infrastructure.
- Event details: The conference would take place on October 6, a Monday, to accommodate the university president. The agenda had been finalized and would be shared with the board.

- Speaker invitations: Keynote speakers included university officials like the President, the Provost, and Mark Perrarson from the FRA. An invitation was extended to the executive director of the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).
- Board presentations: Dr. Islam requested if there was anyone from the governing board to present for five to ten minutes at the conference. Ms. Gonzales asked for detailed agenda for the conference.

4) Revision of Bylaws

Dr. Islam presented the following changes based on the previous discussion and his own opinion.

- This board would direct spending of any money, not only the state funded money
- The selection of board members was under the hand of the Governor and the University President as explained in the House Bill. But somehow, the president part was missed in the Bylaws and now, got added. In addition, the removal of the Board Member was also under the hand of the Governor and the University President, not the Board
- There was no time limit for the Board member's term in the SCITT House Bill. Therefore, we need to delete, "For members that the Governor appoints, terms are 2-4 years in duration and staggered."

Ms. Gonzales asked for a motion to approve the changes to the bylaws. Dr. Lehmpuhl entertained the motion and Dr. Cohn seconded the motion and was approved unanimously.

5) State-Mandated Annual Training

Ms. Gonzales proposed a change in the sequence of the agenda item to defer the State-Mandated Annual Training at the end to accommodate Mr. Michael McMaster from the Colorado Attorney General's Office and there is a possibility that she might leave early to catch her next meeting at noon. No vote was taken; however, all agreed.

6) Next Meeting

August 13, 2025, Wednesday, 10:00 AM (primarily focuses the strategic planning)

7) Action Items

- a. Dr. Islam would publish the meeting minutes for January 29th for public access
- b. Dr. Islam would report changes to the current budget, if any
- c. Dr. Islam would send the recording of the meeting to the members who could not attend the meeting
- d. Dr. Islam would prepare a draft of the strategic plan

8) Public Comments

Ms. Gonzales asked if there was any public comment. There was none.

9) State-Mandated Annual Training

Dr. Islam mentioned that an annual training was mandatory, and Ms. Gonzales invited Mr. McMaster to carry over. Michael started saying that this training covers the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA), the Colorado Open Meetings Law (OML), and conflict of interest regulations.

Colorado Open Records Act (CORA)

- Public records defined: CORA requires that most government records be open for public inspection. Public records are defined broadly to include "all writings made, maintained, or kept by the state" that are used in exercising authorized functions or involve the expenditure of public funds.
- "Writings" defined: The definition of "writing" was extensive, encompassing books, papers, maps, photographs, and all digitally stored data, including emails and text messages. The statute is meant to be all-encompassing, with narrow and specific exceptions.
- Scope of records: Records involving public business are subject to disclosure, even if created or sent using a board member's personal phone or email.
- Key takeaway: Assume any document created or received while conducting board business is a public record. McMaster suggested that if you are not comfortable with a communication ending up on the front page of a newspaper, you should reconsider saying it.

Colorado Open Meetings Law (OML)

- Purpose: The law, also known as the Sunshine Law, promotes governmental transparency and accountability.
- Meeting definition: For a state board, a "meeting" occurs whenever two or more board members discuss public business or take formal action. This applies to any form of gathering, including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, or electronic communications.
- Email communications: Discussions of "the merits or substance" of public business should occur in an open meeting. Emails can be used for scheduling or forwarding information without triggering OML, but mixing in substantive discussion would violate the law.
- Formal action notice: Meetings involving "formal action" like approving bylaws or passing resolutions require public notice.

Conflict of interest

- Public trust: Board members hold a position of public trust and owe fiduciary duty to the public, not their personal interests.
- Ethical conduct: Members must avoid performing official acts that result in a financial or personal benefit to themselves or create the appearance of impropriety.
- Disclosure and recusal: When a potential conflict of interest arises, a board member must disclose it and may need to recuse themselves from discussion and voting on the issue.
- Safe harbors: The law provides exceptions for certain benefits, such as unsolicited gifts of trivial value, payments for speeches, and reimbursements from non-profits or government entities.

Training logistics

- Video recording: The session was being recorded, and Michael confirmed that board members who missed the live training can watch the recording.
- Documentation: An absent board member would be sent the recording and would notify Dr. Islam by email after watching it to confirm their compliance.

Ms. Staes asked a question with a hypothetical situation like if she ran into a coffee shop with a member and somehow this discussion about the Institute matter comes up. Was that not allowed, or did it need to be reported to the Board. Michael answered that in that instance, assuming no formal action has been taken, it would be okay to gossip. Michael also explained further that any general discussions are good unless there was a decision made.

As Ms. Gonzales left the meeting a few minutes before the end of the training session, Ann, as the Vice Chair asked if there was any other question. There was none. She then asked for a motion to adjourn. Dr. Lehmpuhl entertained the motion, and Ms. Staes seconded the motion and was approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 PM.