



NEBRASKA STATE FAIR BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 19, 2026

The meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was held on Friday, June 19, 2026 at 1:00 pm at the Nebraska State Fair Administrative Offices in Grand Island, NE. Public notice of this meeting was published in the Grand Island Independent newspaper on June 11, 2026; posted to the Nebraska Public Meeting Calendar website; and on the Nebraska State Fair website. The public was invited to attend in person.

Roll call was read with the following Board members present: Boyd Strobe, Chairman; Tom Schellpeper, Vice Chair; Lanna Hubbard, Treasurer; John McKeever, Secretary; Alan Kahle; Anna Castner Wightman; Dawn Caldwell; Kevin Havlovic; Scott Russman; Tom Dinsdale; and Ryan Hassebrook. Absent: Kathleen Lodl, Mark Hesser

Others in attendance: Jaime Parr, Executive Director; Karli Bartz, Entertainment & Events Director; Courtney Glock, Marketing Director; Keaton Irwin, Sales Director; Breanna Kozisek, Business Administrator; Kourtney Lingeman, Competitive Exhibits Manager; Nicki Stoltzenberg, Sponsorship Director; Tina Thuernagle, Operations Director; Lindsey Koepke, 1868 Foundation Executive Director (Zoom); Joe Stump, AMGL; and public guests.

The June 19th meeting of the Nebraska State Fair Board was called to order by Chairman Boyd Strobe at 1:02 pm.

Strobe announced the meeting had been properly advertised as an open meeting and informed those in attendance of the on-site posting location of the Open Meetings Act.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion made by Kevin Havlovic for the Approval of Consent Agenda, which included the Regular Meeting Minutes of May 15, 2026.

Second by Tom Dinsdale.

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve consent agenda passed unanimously.

Financial Report by Joe Stump, AMGL

Alan Kahle moved to approve the May 2026 Financials as presented.

Second by John McKeever.

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve passed unanimously.

Committee & Staff Reports

Events Report by Anna Castner Wightman and Karli Bartz

Anna Castner Whitman deferred reporting to Karli Bartz.

Grand Marshal Program

- Final preparations are underway to recognize six individuals during the 2026 Nebraska State Fair.

Internship Program

- An intern joined the team on June 1 and has contributed significantly to projects related to Ag Acres renovations and construction efforts.

Concerts

- Ticket sales are more than 60% ahead of the same time last year.
- Outdoor concert ticket sales continue to perform well.

County Fair Day

- County fairs are encouraged to register through the State Fair website to participate on the first Saturday of the Fair.

Nebraska State Fair Marathon

- Registration remains strong.
- The T-shirt design contest has concluded, and the winning design was selected.
- Participants from 31 states have registered, matching last year's participation.

Volunteer and Box-Office Updates

- More than 2,000 volunteer shifts have been filled.
- Approximately 400 volunteers have signed up.

Board members were reminded to submit tickets and box office requests.

Facilities Planning & Operations Report by Tom Schellpeper and Tina Thuernagle

Tom Schellpeper deferred reporting to Tina.

Capital Projects and Infrastructure

- Updates were provided on ARPA, GILCA, and Beyond the Budget projects.
- Additional American flags will be installed throughout the grounds.
- Water and sewer service has been extended to the shop warehouse area.
- Plumbing bids are being obtained to complete the project.

USS Nebraska Submarine Exhibit

- A submarine-themed photo opportunity has been completed in Raising Nebraska. Six sailors from the USS Nebraska recently visited and viewed the exhibit.

Fair Preparations

- Staff continue final project adjustments and preparations for seasonal employees.

Agriculture Report by Dawn Caldwell and Vaughn Sievers

Dawn Caldwell deferred reporting to Vaughn.

Livestock and Animal Health

-Discussion centered on exhibitor education and communication regarding livestock infractions and expectations.

Committee members attended meetings regarding:

- Foot-and-mouth disease preparedness
- Vesicular Stomatitis (VS)
- Asian Longhorn Tick concerns
- New World Screwworm monitoring
- Future educational meetings will be scheduled regarding animal disease response protocols.

Entries and Exhibitor Programs

- Entries open July 1.

FFA and 4-H systems are prepared for entry processing.

Industry Outreach

- An article detailing Nebraska State Fair judge-selection procedures was published in the IAFE magazine.

Staff attended livestock industry events in Reno, Nevada, and Des Moines, Iowa, to gain insight and build industry relationships.

AKSS Updates

- Efforts continue to strengthen advisory and booster group participation.

New intern Josie from Montana has joined the livestock team and has provided valuable assistance.

Awards and Recognition

The Nebraska State Fair Rodeo received a significant industry award for the second consecutive year.

FFA Report by Ryan Hassebrook

Ryan Hassebrook reported:

The animal nomination deadline was June 15.

- **Entry system opens July 1.**

More than 5,000 animals are expected to be eligible for participation.

- **Entries close August 10.**

4-H Report by Kathleen Lodi

- **No report. Kathleen Lodi was absent.**

Finance Report by Boyd Strobe

Boyd Strobe reported:

The committee reviewed financial reports in detail.

Updates were provided regarding GILCA.

ARPA projects continue toward completion.

Discussions continue regarding AKSS scholarship funds and future fundraising collaborations.

HR Report by Lanna Hubbard

Consideration of HR Policies

Breanna presented seven updated policies that had previously been distributed to the Board:

- **Records Retention Policy**
- **Company Credit Card Agreement**
- **Travel Expense Policy**
- **Training Investment Policy**
- **Remote Work Policy**
- **Grievance Procedure Policy**
- **Employee Grievance Policy**

A Confidentiality & HIPAA Policy will be presented next month.

Travel Expense Policy Amendment

Anna Kastner Whitman proposed revisions to the meal per diem language:

Remove the second sentence.

Remove "in-state" verbiage from the first sentence.

Approval of HR policies with the amendment to the Travel Expense Policy

Motion made by Lanna Hubbard for the Approval of HR policies with the amendment to the Travel Expense Policy.

Second by Alan Kahle

Upon roll call vote, motion to approve consent agenda passed unanimously.

Sales Report by Keaton Irwin

Keaton Irwin reported:

County Fair Tours

- **June and July remain focused on county fair outreach visits.**

Volunteer Program

- **Volunteer hours increased approximately 41% during May.**

New and Unique Foods Contest

- **Contest participation continues to grow significantly.**

- Entry limits are being adjusted to improve judging efficiency.
- Vendor creativity and engagement remain strong.

Vendor Promotions

- New Flavors, New Finds banners will return.
- Nebraska Business signage will again be available to participating vendors.

AKSS

- Forty-two contracts have been distributed.
- Focus has shifted toward collecting payments and certificates of insurance before Fair time.

Vendor Feedback

- Longtime concessionaires praised recent facility improvements and investments throughout the grounds.

Marketing Report by Courtney Glock

Courtney Glock reported:

Fair Guide and Visitor Information

- The 2026 Gate book/Visitor Guide is in production.
- Distribution is expected during the second week of August.

Advertising

- Social media campaigns have begun.
- Digital advertising efforts continue to expand through Meta and regional movie theaters across Nebraska.

Grounds Enhancements

- Marketing and Operations continue improvements to:
- Gate 2
- Gate 10
- Pedestrian entrances
- Digital signage across the grounds

Concert Sales

- Strong ticket sales continue for:
- Shinedown
- Phil Wickham
- KC & The Sunshine Band

Courtney recognized staff members for their contributions to Fair preparations.

Sponsorship Report by Nicki Stoltenberg

Sponsor Fulfillment

- Sponsorship ticket fulfillment is underway.
- Strong concert demand required implementation of stricter ticket deadlines.

Banner and Asset Updates

- Sponsors are replacing aging signage and banners throughout the grounds.

IEG Sponsorship Initiative

- Staff continue working with IEG to refine sponsorship valuation tools and future rate card development.

Professional Development

- Nicki attended agricultural sales training in Omaha and shared key takeaways regarding relationship-based sales and customer engagement.

Executive Report by Boyd Strobe

The VenuWorks agreement continues under legal review.

ARPA project discussions remain ongoing.

1868 Foundation Report by Lindsey Koepke

250th Patriot Leaders Campaign

Individuals committing \$10,000 over four years will be recognized on a permanent bronze monument celebrating America's 250th Anniversary.

- **Installation is scheduled for August 14.**
- **Thirty-one names have been secured to date.**
- **Funds raised will support youth premiums and capital improvements.**

Great Steak Debate

- **Opening-night fundraiser planning continues.**
- **Highlights include:**
- **Nebraska beef showcase**
- **Chef competition**
- **Live auction**
- **Entertainment by Exit 312**

Fundraising goal: \$125,000

Trustee Banquet

- **A donor reception and trustee banquet will be held during the State Fair.**

Executive Director Report by Jaime Parr

Financial Oversight

Staff continue weekly reviews of payables, balance sheets, bank balances, and general ledger reports.

Capital Improvement Projects

- **Northwest parking lot concrete work is nearing completion.**
- **South campus improvements remain on schedule.**
- **Grand District utility infrastructure continues to progress.**
- **Stolley Park Road improvements remain on track.**

Regulatory and Community Relations

- **Meeting with the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission scheduled for July 7.**
- **Public safety coordination meeting scheduled for July 10.**

Staffing

- **Seasonal hiring continues successfully as staffing expands from approximately 17 employees to nearly 500.**

County Fair Tours

- **The 2026 County Fair Tour begins on June 30 at Bertrand Days.**

Lifetime Pass Program

- **Board members were encouraged to submit nominations by August 1.**

Board Participation Calendar

- **Board members were reminded to review event assignments and RSVP requests.**

Staff Recognition

Jaime recognized staff members for significant contributions, including:

- **Tina and Eileen for the USS Nebraska exhibit.**
- **Courtney Glock for receiving a special award.**
- **Nicki Stoltenberg for induction into a local leadership hall of fame.**
- **Vaughn and Kourtney Lingeman for professional recognition.**

Upcoming Board Meetings

- **July 17, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting**

During the Nebraska State Fair

- **August 28 (Opening Day)**
- **September 1**

- September 7 (Closing Day)
- October Meeting
Comprehensive event-season wrap-up.
- November Meeting
Strategic planning session focused on mission, vision, values, and five-year goals.

Additional Board Comments

Board members discussed:

- Transition of GILCA responsibilities to Fonner Park.
- Tina's efforts to assist with a smooth transition.
- Importance of Board presence at livestock championship drives and recognition events.
- Condolences extended to the Lent family and the AKSS community following a recent loss.

Adjournment

Motion made by John McKeever to adjourn.

Second by Kevin Havolic.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 2:23 pm.

Minutes of June 19, 2026

Nebraska State Fair Approved:

Date: July 17, 2026

By: 
John McKeever, Board Secretary