

Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University
Regular Board Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2025

A regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University was convened on Thursday, September 18, 2025 in the Student Union Alumni Hall located at 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625. Trustee J. Todd Phillips, Chair of the Board, called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

Roll was called and the following Trustees were present: Carlos Garcia; Jorge Leon; Daniela Navarrete; Michelle Morales; J. Todd Phillips; and Paula Wolff

Trustees not present: Betty Fleurimond, Ann Kalayil, and Anna Meresidis

Also present: Katrina Bell-Jordan, President; Nicki Bazer, Interim General Counsel; Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board; vice presidents; students; staff; and University community members both in person and viewing online

Motion to Permit Remote Participation by Trustees

Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Morales, moved to permit remote participation by Trustee Betty Fleurimond pursuant to Section 7(a)(ii) of the IL Open Meetings Act.

Discussion: Trustee Fleurimond contacted the Assistant Secretary in advance of today's meeting to request to participate remotely

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond:	Kalayil:	Meresidis:	Navarrete: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Morales: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Administration of Past Meeting Minutes and Records

Trustee Morales, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to approve the open and closed minutes from the June 5, 2025 meeting and to keep the closed minutes closed pursuant to Section 2.06(3)(b) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Morales, moved that the confidential written minutes from the closed session portions of the June 13, 2024 Special Board meeting; the June 25, 2024 Special Board meeting; and the July 30, 2024 Special Board meeting; require confidential treatment and will remain confidential pursuant to Section 2.06(3)(d) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Opportunity for Public Comment in Accordance with P. A. 91-0715

Chair Phillips announced the opportunity for public comment. There were 6 registrations placed in advance and 5 presentations made.

1. **Rebekah Fitchett**, representing AFSCME Local 1989
Topic: Approve the AFSCME contract
2. **Heather Carper**, representing self
Topic: Union contract urgency

3. **Ashlee Grant**, representing AFSCME Local 1989
Topic: Addressing a swift conclusion of agreement for our new contract
4. **Jonathan Gronli**, representing AFSCME Local 1989
Topic: Endorsement for approval of the contract
5. **Rosetta Cash**, representing Key Control and NEIU Community
Topic: Our URGENTLY desperate and essential need for a LOCKSMITH

Chair's and President's Remarks

President Bell-Jordan welcomed everyone back for the Fall 2025 semester and reported that the University experienced modest enrollment growth, particularly a 1% increase in graduate students and a 6%+ increase in transfer students, as well as a significant increase in student retention. Student retention improved by 8% this fall. This growth is attributed to the University's efforts and partnerships with community colleges along with sustained and scaled-up efforts across the University to support students by improving internal processes.

The new Veterans Services Center will open on October 6th on the fourth floor of the Ronald Williams Library. An open house will be held around 3 p.m. The center will provide academic and wraparound support to veteran students. NEIU is grateful to the many partners and leaders who made this center a reality.

The One-Stop Shop project is moving into the architectural design phase. The designs are being reviewed to ensure they reflect the intended uses and functions, allowing for effective support for students. A cross-functional team from various campus departments is involved in the project, including the registrar's office, enrollment management, and academic advising.

The September 2nd refinancing of the University's debt included buying the Nest housing facility from the former public-private partnership, Collegiate Housing Foundation (CHF). NEIU has signed a 9-month management agreement with American Campus Communities (ACC) to continue managing the facility while the University searches for a director for residence life to oversee the seamless handover of management to the University. The University will transition to complete management of the housing facility next May.

The Ed.D. in Leadership, Equity, and Inquiry program has received full accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission. The Master of Science in Nursing: Entrance into Practice (MSNEP) program received approval from the Illinois Board of Higher Education and is awaiting approval from the Illinois Board of Nursing and the Higher Learning Commission. The program has received \$1.28 million in federal support thanks to Congresswoman Delia Ramirez. The Computer Science department recently received Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation, and a new Computer Science Bachelor's of Science in Artificial Intelligence degree program will be presented today for Board approval.

Chair Phillips remarked that NEIU's goal is to be the pinnacle of education in the community, a destination for students and faculty, and a model of excellence for other universities. He further acknowledged the often unnoticed and underappreciated daily efforts that contribute to the University's achievements. Chair Phillips expressed his gratitude to all who contribute to the work, accomplishments, and success of Northeastern.

University Initiatives

President Bell-Jordan invited the Strategic Planning leads, Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Shayne Cofer, Interim Vice President for Enrollment Management, Claudia Mercado, and Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, Chris Childers, to provide a brief on the University's strategic planning work to date. NEIU's new strategic plan is focusing on stability, rebuilding,

and growth over the next five years. The plan, informed by data, community input, and expert guidance, aims to be mission-aligned and future-focused. The University is currently in phase five of the planning process, presenting its finalized goals, and will move on to developing tactics and KPIs by December.

The five revised goals were presented and focus on retention, curricular innovation, infrastructure, branding, and fiscal stability. The plan aims to address financial impact, student equity gaps, and faculty and staff excellence while remaining aligned with the University's mission. The strategic plan for NEIU is being developed amidst a fluid and uncertain environment, particularly concerning the its Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) status. NEIU is taking a thoughtful approach to potential legal challenges, partnering with other institutions, and advocating at the state and federal levels to protect its funding and resources. The next steps involve developing goal teams to develop specific objectives and KPI's for each goal. The timeline is ambitious, but the planning team is confident in its ability to be able to present its work by January.

Blanca Jara, Interim Executive Director of Government Relations, provided a legislative update. To recap: the past legislative session was active with strong stakeholder engagement, resulting in an approved state budget that included a 1% appropriation for all public universities and an additional 2% in reserve and discretionary funding. NEIU secured \$400,000 in capital appropriations for infrastructure, and approximately \$1 million in new and reappropriated funding for the Afghan Refugee Transition Program (ARTP). The legislative outlook for NEIU focuses on building a stronger narrative about the importance of state appropriation and its impact on its students, higher education, and workforce development. NEIU's legislative requests are aligned with institutional priorities and strategic planning initiatives, emphasizing student success, enrollment growth, technology, infrastructure, and operational needs. Trustees are encouraged to engage with legislative caucuses, policy forums, and community partners to advance NEIU's government relations strategy, and to strengthen partnerships across the state.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee met on Thursday, September 11, 2025 at the main campus. The committee received briefings in both open and closed sessions from the University's Internal Auditor, Chrystal Temples, and is presenting the following three items for Board action. These items are presented annually to the Audit Committee by the University's Internal Auditor to comply with FCIAA guidelines and Global Internal Auditing Standards.

Action Item I. A. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Accept and File the Internal Audit Charter

Action Item I. B. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Accept and File the 2026-27 Internal Audit Plan

Action Item I. C. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Accept and File the Statement of Auditor Independence

Trustee Leon, seconded by Trustee Garcia, moved adopt the Audit Committee's recommendations to accept and file Action Items A., B., and C. as presented.

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee

The Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee met on Thursday, September 11, 2025 at the main campus. The Committee has one recommendation to present to the Board today:

Action Item I. D. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the Bachelor of Science in Artificial Intelligence

Trustee Garcia, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to adopt the Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee's recommendation to approve the Bachelor of Science in Artificial Intelligence as presented.

Discussion: if approved by the Board, the program will move to the IBHE for their approval. The program is slated to launch in Fall 2026 and will be the second program of its kind in the IL public higher education forum and the third program of its kind in the state. Resources have already been identified and the program is ready to go.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil:	Meresidis:	Navarrete: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Morales: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Trustee Garcia asked Shayne Cofer to present the newest tenure-track faculty. Dr. Cofer introduced, welcomed and read the biographies for:

Dr. Neha Chauhan, Computer Science	Dr. Amanda Greenbacker-Mitchell, Music
Dr. Ruth Llana Fernandez, World Languages and Cultures	Dr. Emily Esposito, Psychology
Dr. Judith Landeros, Bilingual/cultural Education	Dr. Robert Holmes, Physical Education

The Committee also received informational briefings which included status updates on the Ed.D. and M.S.N. programs, an update on the University's accreditation cycle, a briefing on the University's review of its academic advising activities in partnership with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), an update on the current enrollment and retention figures, and a review of the Nest financials. The Committee will be conducting a periodic review of its charter at the October meeting.

Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee

Chair Phillips reported that the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee met this morning. The Committee has five items to present for Board action today; four for vote now and one for a vote following Closed Session.

Action Item I. E. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the FY26 Final Operating Budget

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to adopt the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's recommendation to approve the FY26 Final Operating Budget as presented.

Discussion: Vice President for Finance and Administration, Beni Ortiz, provided a brief overview of the final budget and answered Trustees' questions. Trustees thanked Beni and her team for the comprehensive and thorough presentation.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil:	Meresidis:	Navarrete: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Morales: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Action Item I. F. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the FY2027 Preliminary Operating and Capital Budgets Request

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to adopt the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's recommendation to approve the FY2027 Preliminary Operating and Capital Budgets Request as presented.

Discussion: Beni Ortiz, provided a brief overview of the preliminary budget and answered Trustees' questions. Trustees thanked Beni and her team for the comprehensive and thorough presentation.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil:	Meresidis:	Navarrete: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Morales: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Action Item I. G. Board Action on Committee Recommendation Regarding Expenditures of \$250,000 or More: Approval of Contract Renewal for Carnegie Dartlet, LLC, for Strategic Marketing and Digital Services

Discussion: Chris Childers provided background on the University's relationship with the vendor and Beni Ortiz reported that the contract is a sole source procurement.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil:	Meresidis:	Navarrete: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Morales: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Action Item I. H. Board Action on Committee Recommendation Regarding Expenditures of \$250,000 or More: Contract Approval with Apache Services and Supply Co., for Janitorial Services at the El Centro Location

Discussion: Beni Ortiz reported that this contract resulted from a competitive bid. Apache is a certified small business in the city of Chicago and is a minority-owned business. Apache will be using sub-contractor Diamond 7 Services, which is a registered BEP vendor. The contract meets the University's 30% participation requirement.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil:	Meresidis:	Navarrete: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Morales: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Motion to Convene in Closed Session

At 2:53 p.m. Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Morales, moved to convene in Closed Session pursuant to Sections 2(c)1, 2(c)2, and 2(c)11 of the IL Open Meetings Act.

Discussion: there was no discussion. Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes Kalayil: Meresidis: Navarrete: Yes Wolff: Yes

Garcia: Yes Leon: Yes Morales: Yes Phillips: Yes

The motion carried.

Motion to Reconvene in Open Session

At 3:47 p.m. Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Morales, moved to reconvene in Open Session. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Open Session

Action Item I. I. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the Contract Between NEIU and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1989

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved the adopt the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's recommendation to approve the contract between NEIU and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Local 1989 on the terms presented.

Discussion: there was no discussion. Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes Kalayil: Meresidis: Navarrete: Yes Wolff: Yes

Garcia: Yes Leon: Yes Morales: Yes Phillips: Yes

The motion carried.

New Business

Next Committee meetings: October 23, 2025

- Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee – 9:30 a.m.
- Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee – 1:00 p.m.

Next Regular Board meeting: November 20, 2025 at the Carruthers Center – 1:00 p.m.

Motion to Adjourn

At 4:00 p.m. Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Morales, moved to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous acclamation.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Todd Phillips, Chair of the Board
Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board
Approved December 11, 2025