Southern States Communication Association

Executive Council Meeting Minutes

96th Annual Convention
Sheraton Birmingham Convention Center, Birmingham, Alabama
Part One: Wednesday, April 8, 2026, 4:00-6:45 p.m. (East N)
Part Two: Thursday, April 9, 2026, 8:00-10:47 a.m. (East N)

1. Call to Order

President Patrick G. Wheaton called the meeting to order.

2. Welcome to Birmingham

President Wheaton welcomed members to Birmingham and to the 96th Annual Convention.

3. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the 2025 SSCA Mid-Year Executive Council Business Meeting held at NCA in Aurora, Colorado, were approved as distributed.

4. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved.

5. Officers' Reports

5.1 President and Committee on Committees

President Wheaton reported on strategic planning efforts and discussed the need to appoint a Strategic Communication Director. He also introduced the proposal for a Centennial Commemoration Committee with a four-year term.

5.2 First Vice President

Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter referred members to the convention program and thanked those involved in planning and organizing the conference.

5.3 Second Vice President

Leland G. Spencer reported on planning meetings, the number of papers submitted, and expressed appreciation to reviewers.

5.4 Immediate Past President and Nominating Committee

Carl M. Cates encouraged members to think broadly about future leadership and nominations.

5.5 Executive Director

Frances Brandau reported on the website transition and the implementation of the new convention app. She reminded members to provide updated information for SSCA website post-convention. Members were encouraged to be prompt in their submission of materials for their divisions and interest groups. She also encouraged prompt early submission for certificates and plaques for the 2027 convention.

5.6 Immediate Past Executive Director

John Haas congratulated Frances Brandau and remarked that she was off to an excellent start as Executive Director.

5.7 Southern Communication Journal Editor

Rebekah Fox reported on current challenges facing scholarly publishing, including the increasing role of AI and international IRB issues. She also noted the importance of a shadow year to prepare the next editor for success.

5.8 NCA Legislative Assembly Representatives

Laurie Metcalf reported on discussions at NCA regarding long-term financial concerns, noting that NCA currently holds approximately $8 million in reserves but spends roughly $1 million annually to operate. She also noted proposed increases in dues and concerns regarding new expenditures.

Ryan Tabrizi and Antonio Spikes also provided updates from the Legislative Assembly.

5.9 NCA Nominating Committee Representative

Heather Ashley Hayes encouraged SSCA members to become involved in NCA leadership. She emphasized the need to recruit geographically and ideologically diverse candidates and noted that April is the time to begin identifying future nominees.

6. Committee Reports

6.1 Constitution Committee

David R. Nelson presented ten proposed constitutional amendments. <u>Seven</u> of the amendments involved changing references to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

Additional constitutional revisions addressed:

1. Updating language regarding division membership percentages

2. Revising Article 10, Section 2
3. Allowing meetings in Article 5, Section 3 to be conducted virtually
4. Clarifying access to SSCA bank accounts
5. Correcting minor typographical and procedural language

Discussion focused primarily on the proposed renaming of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

DEI Committee Name Discussion

The Constitution Committee recommended renaming the committee to **Community Building**.

During discussion, an alternative name, **Member Engagement and Innovation**, was proposed.

A motion was made to postpone consideration of the DEI-related amendments until the November Executive Council meeting and to survey the membership regarding possible committee names.

Motion: Postpone amendments related to the DEI Committee name until the November 2026 meeting and survey the membership regarding possible names.

Result: Motion failed.

Following additional discussion, a motion was considered to rename the committee **Member Engagement and Innovation**.

Motion: Rename the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to Member Engagement and Innovation.

Result: Motion failed.

The Council then returned to the original constitutional amendments.

Motion: Approve Amendment No. 1, replacing “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” with “Community Building” in Article V, Section 1(A).

Result: Amendment approved.

Subsequent amendments related to the committee name and associated constitutional language were considered and approved as part of the Constitution Committee recommendations.

Additional discussion included:

1. Concerns that the current DEI terminology creates barriers for members in some states and institutions
2. Recognition that the committee's work remains important regardless of the title used
3. A desire to continue supporting students and members from underrepresented and marginalized groups
4. Suggestions that future membership input may still be gathered regarding the committee's name and mission
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 2. Motion carried.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 3. Motion passed.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 4. Amendment approved.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 5. Motion carried.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 6. Amendment approved.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 7. Motioned passed.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 8. Motion carried.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 9. Motion failed.
   Motion: Approve Amendment No. 10. Amendment approved.

6.2 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

Mary M. Meares discussed the committee's work and expressed support for retaining the committee's focus on member well-being and inclusion.

The committee also recommended changing the Minority Recruitment and Retention Award to a more student-centered title.

The committee recommended a constitutional change to remove the formal order of ascension for committee leadership because the committee currently functions with one member in year two and one member in year three.

6.3 Finance Committee

Nakia Welch presented an extensive financial analysis of the association.

Key points included:

1. The annual convention currently costs approximately $80,000-$120,000 to operate.
2. The convention costs approximately $250 per attendee while members currently pay significantly less in registration fees.

3. SSCA has historically lost approximately $7,000-$15,000 annually after Southern Communication Journal revenue offsets convention losses.
4. The Southern Communication Journal is currently the association's primary source of positive revenue.
5. Food and beverage minimums in hotel contracts continue to rise sharply, with future convention contracts expected to require significantly higher expenditures.
6. SSCA has already reduced expenses by:
    1. Eliminating the printed program
    2. Adopting a convention app
    3. Reducing shipping costs by transporting materials directly
    4. Reducing award expenses

Nakia presented several membership and registration fee options. There was substantive discussion as to which approach was best, which included a motion to amend option D to include Patron membership and increase the costs of non-member conference registration. Motion to amend passed.

Motion: Adopt Amended Finance Committee Option D for increases in membership and convention registration rates.

Moved by John Haas. Seconded by Karen Hill. Motion carried.

Discussion emphasized the need to protect the long-term financial sustainability of the association.

The Council also discussed the Strategic Communication Director stipend and agreed that the position should remain a funded line item. There was a motion to amend the budget to fund this position. Motion carried.
Motion: Approved the amended budget. Approved by the Executive Council and forwarded to the membership for final approval.

6.4 Publications Committee

The committee offered no report.

6.5 Resolutions Committee

Breann Murphy presented the Resolutions Committee report.

6.6 Resource and Membership Development Committee

Michelle Groover presented the committee report.

6.7 Time and Place Committee

The Council resumed consideration of the 2030 convention site.

The two finalists were Myrtle Beach and Jacksonville.

Discussion included:

1. Relative travel costs and accessibility
2. The potential to reduce future site visit costs by using Jacksonville as the likely 2031 location
3. Possibilities for negotiating discounts with hotel chains if the association books with the same chain in consecutive years

Motion: Select Myrtle Beach as the 2030 convention site and recommend that the Time and Place Committee consider Jacksonville for 2031.

Result: Motion approved.

6.8 Strategic Communication Director Search Committee

Elizabeth Hanson Smith reported that the search committee recommended Nakia Welch for the position of Strategic Communication Director.

Motion: Appoint Nakia Welch as Strategic Communication Director.

Result: Motion approved.

Discussion followed regarding compensation for the position. Members agreed that the position should remain a funded line item because of the extensive responsibilities involved.

6.9 Administrative Committee

Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, on behalf of the Administrative Committee, recommended Joshua Guitar as the next editor of Southern Communication Journal.

Motion: Appoint Joshua Guitar as Editor-Elect of Southern Communication Journal for Volumes 92, 93, and 94.

Result: Motion approved.

7. Division and Interest Group Reports

Written reports from the divisions and interest groups were accepted as submitted in the meeting packet. No oral reports were <u>presented due to time constraints</u>.

8. Old Business

8.1 Centennial Commemoration Committee

The Council returned to the previously tabled proposal to create a Centennial Commemoration Committee.

The proposed committee would:

1. Consist of three to five members
2. Serve for four years
3. Plan SSCA's centennial celebration
4. Develop budget recommendations and a timeline during the first year

Motion: Create the Centennial Commemoration Committee.

Result: Motion approved.

The incoming president, Narissra Punyanant-Carter, will appoint the members of the committee.

9. New Business

No additional new business was introduced.

10. Announcements

Elizabeth Hanson Smith reminded division chairs and vice chairs to pick up ribbons at registration and encouraged leaders to invite members to division business meetings to strengthen the leadership pipeline.

Members were reminded that:

1. Registration remained open
2. Officer office hours and the Welcome Reception would be held in the Forum Building, Room K
3. Some events were located across the skywalk from the main convention center

Members were also advised that the hotel layout was confusing and that additional elevators were available near the Forum Building.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m. on Thursday, April 9, 2026.