



Tree Research and Education Endowment Fund Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Location: Davey Tree Expert Company SEED Campus, Kent, Ohio

Format: In-person with Teams

Date: May 21, 2026

Members Attending in Person: David Gorden, Chair
Sam VanMaanen, Chair-Elect and Development Committee Chair
Jon Hicks, Vice Chair
Carol Donnelly, Secretary/Treasurer
Rachel Barker, Past Chair
Anne Beard, ISA Component Council Representative
Asia Dowtin, Communications Committee Chair
Ben Rickenbacker, Liaisons Committee Chair
Kristina Bezanson, Trustee
Kyle McCann, Trustee
Cindy Schwab, Trustee
Vivek Shandas, Trustee

Members Attending Virtually: Megan Fielding, Trustee
Andrew Koeser, Research and Education Committee Chair

Staff Attending in Person: Dr. Paul Putman, President and CEO
Jonathan Cain, Communications and Engagement Manager
Heath Hupke, Grants and Development Manager

Guest: Elizabeth Honold, Contract Finance Director

Absent: Patrick Franklin, Trustee

Following a welcome from Davey Tree Expert Company CEO Pat Covey the meeting was called to order at 8:11 am by Chair Gorden. A quorum was established with 14 of 15 trustees present. The meeting began with introductions and a Mission Moment from a grateful webinar attendee shared by Mr. Hupke.

- I. Consent Agenda
Consent Agenda was presented.

- Motion: Approve to approve by Past Chair Barker; seconded by Treasurer Donnelly
Vote: Approved unanimously.

II. Financial Recap

Treasurer Connelly and Financial Director Honold presented a recap of the organization finances for the first quarter of 2026 as the 2025 Audit is still being put together. Strong assets and assets are growing. Individual giving down significantly in 2025, constant with reports of other non-profit organizations. 1st Quarter budget is looking good. Partner/ Sponsor money is coming in as planned. Have contracted a new investment advisor eCIO, approved in Consent Agenda.

III. President/CEO Report

President Putman gave an update on happenings for the last quarter.

- Discussion on potential Saluting Branches partnership.
 - Paul had some discussions with representatives from Saluting Branches. Their mission is not directly linked with ours, although there is an educational component to their work, so discussion requested. A positive point was that it potentially brings in students from local universities and exposes them to TREE Fund. The Board encouraged staff to continue conversations.
- Grants and Scholarships update
 - Revisions to the process to be discussed and voted on later in meeting.
 - Voting on approval from grants and scholarships from the Spring 2026 Cycle. Grants and Development Manager Hupke reviewed the suggested candidates for this cycle's research and education grants and student scholarships. Motion to approve by Trustee Downtin, seconded by Trustee Schwab. Unanimous vote with Trustee Shandas not present and Trustee Bezanson abstaining.
- Nelsen Money Scholarship
 - President Putman disclosed the details regarding hosting Utility Arborist Association's Nelsen Money Scholarship. A vote by both boards are needed for TREE Fund to host the funds for this scholarship. If approved, it will be announced at the Trees & Utilities Conference in the Fall. Past Chair Barker motioned to approve; Trustee Bezanson seconded. Unanimous vote to approve with Trustee Shandas absent.
- Review of Goals, Highlights, and Strategic Plan
 - During a review of goals and organizations in which to strengthen relationships with in 2026, Trustee Koeser inquired about the difference in focusing on Land Grant Institution listings as opposed to regionalized institutions. Trustee Downtin clarified that the thinking was to create a starting point with the institution lists.

- Trustee Shandas brought up the topic of committee building and how TREE Fund's committees can represent different groups. Some discussion regarding what additional outreach is being done to groups outside the industry for grants.

IV. Committee Overviews

- Development Committee
 - Discussion regarding the topic of a “rainy day” fund and how to best address that with potential donors. “Irrigation Fund” was tossed out as a possible name.
- Executive and Governance Committee
 - Discussion about creation of a 25th Anniversary sub-committee
 - Visions discussed regarding how the anniversary is rolled out.
 - A focus on the possibility of an operations endowment
 - Research Summit possibilities: positives and negatives of hosting
 - Focus on research leading to standards
 - Trustee Koeser clarified the idea of a literature review and possibly answering a RFP from ISA for \$15,000 so that students can get to work on researching TREE Fund funded research from the past.
- Liaison Committee
 - When discussing communication with the chapters, Trustee Downtin asked about how chapter executives are getting information and how the communication stream is helping.

I. Call to Order

Following lunch the meeting was called to order by Board leadership. A quorum was present. Trustee Fielding returned to the meeting at 1:00pm.

2. Policy Review and Approvals

Section I – Declaration of Trust

Revision allows for international grantmaking, aligning policy with current practice.

Minor formatting updates were included.

Motion: Approve revisions to Section I by Trustee Rickenbacker, seconded by Vice Chair Hicks.

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

Section 2 – Governance and Management

Key updates: Change “obedience” to “adherence.”

Added numbering for clarity

Clarified trustee expectations, including:

- Duties of care, loyalty, and adherence
- Confidentiality and compliance responsibilities
- 75% attendance expectation for board and committee participation

Added language on:

- Geographic diversity
- Succession planning
- Board self-assessment
- Inclusion and culture

Discussion resulted in replacing the phrase “duty of obedience” with “duty of adherence.”

Motion: Approve Section 2 with revised terminology (“adherence”) motioned by Trustee Bezanson, seconded by Past Chair Barker

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

Section 5 – Audit, Finance, and Investment Committee

Key updates:

- Committee renamed to Audit, Finance, and Investment Committee
- Added expanded investment oversight responsibilities
- Introduced Investment Policy Statement (new appendix)
- Clarified approval requirements for complex gifts

Motion: Approve revisions including committee name change by Trustee Schwab, seconded by Trustee Beard

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

Section 6 – Operating Policies / Employee Handbook

Key updates:

Multi-state compliance clarification

Added:

- Whistleblower protections
- Remote work safety expectations
- Annual compliance training (EEO/harassment)
- Office closure last week of year

PTO policy updates and expense timelines

Retirement Plan Decision:

Approved Option A: 100% employer match up to 4% of salary

Motion: Approve Section 6 with Option A included. Motion to approve with Option A by Trustee Beard, seconded by Past Chair Barker.

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

Section 7 – Risk Management & Cybersecurity

Key updates:

- Enhanced incident response protocols
- Added cybersecurity appendices (incident response + insurance requirements)
- Clarified roles and escalation protocols
- Incorporated insurance provider recommendations

Motion: Approve revisions with noted administrative updates adding in Russ Delinger's contact info.

Motion to approve by Past Chair Barker, seconded by Trustee Beard.

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

3. New Policy Adoption

Effectiveness Policy

Introduced to align with Better Business Bureau best practices

Establishes framework for:

- Program evaluation
- Mission alignment tracking
- Long-term performance measurement

Board acknowledged phased implementation over several years

Motion: Approve Effectiveness Policy with added language noting multi-year implementation. Motion to approve by Trustee Downtin, seconded by Trustee Bezanson.

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy

Minor revisions for clarity and consistency

Annual acknowledgement required for trustees, staff, and volunteers

Motion: Approve updated policy. Motion to approve by Trustee Beard, seconded by Vice Chair Hicks.

Vote: Approved unanimously. Trustee Fielding absent.

4. Tour des Trees 2027 Planning

Proposed route: In Canada, around Ottawa/Montreal, ending at ISA Conference
Includes potential 5+1 day ride format

Pros:

- Alignment with ISA Conference
- Rider interest and international visibility

Considerations:

- Canadian TREE Fund agreement requires renegotiation
- Staff to decide on best time to make announcement to give potential riders time to plan and get passports.

Motion: Approve continued planning contingent on favorable agreement terms. Motion to approve by Trustee Beard, seconded by Trustee Rickenbacker.

Vote: Approved unanimously.

5. Fund Agreements

ISA Research Fund (New)

5-year pilot partnership with ISA

Structure:

~\$50,000 annually for grants

ISA Science & Research Committee to guide priorities

TREE Fund retains final approval authority

Motion: Approve ISA Research Fund agreement. Motion to approve by Trustee Koeser, seconded by Trustee Schwab. Trustee Downton abstain.

Vote: Approved unanimously with one abstention.

Bonnie Appleton Memorial Fund Agreement

Formalizes existing scholarship program

Key decision:

Suggested to create a one-pager detailing what it takes to organize a fund a scholarship to help other organizations understand the amount of work behind them.

Administrative fee set at 1.5% (minimum standard)

Includes eligibility preferences for Mid-Atlantic region

Motion: Approve agreement with 1.5% administrative fee and having the MAC-ISA Board discuss.

Motion to approve by Trustee Beard, seconded by Past Chair Barker.

Vote: Approved unanimously. [Board meet...Recording | Video]

6. Mission Statement Review

Board approved minor revision adding: “and best practices”

Purpose: better reflect application of research to industry standards

Motion: Approve revised mission statement. Motion to approve by Past Chair Barker, seconded by Trustee Shandas.

Vote: Approved unanimously

2. Policy Review and Approvals

Sections 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 were reviewed and approved with revisions as presented, including international grantmaking authorization, governance clarifications, committee renaming, employee handbook updates, and cybersecurity enhancements.

3. New Policy Adoption

The Effectiveness Policy was adopted with acknowledgment of phased implementation. The Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy was approved with minor revisions and annual acknowledgment requirements.

4. Tour des Trees 2027 Planning

The Board approved continued planning for a proposed Ottawa-to-Montreal route ending at the ISA Conference, contingent on satisfactory partner agreement terms.

5. Fund Agreements

The ISA Research Fund (5-year pilot) was approved. The Bonnie Appleton Memorial Fund Agreement was approved with a 1.5% administrative fee.

6. Mission Statement Review

The Board approved a revision adding 'and best practices' to the mission statement.

7. Other Business

Stakeholder survey discussion was postponed.

Adjournment

The formal meeting was adjourned following completion of agenda items and staff was excused while board held executive session.

Executive Session called to order at 2:45pm (after conclusion of regular Board meeting).

Board evaluation of President and CEO Putman – Board was notified that the process would be beginning soon and to be watching for information.

Part-time staff – Discussion regarding the possibility of adding part-time staff. Board was agreeable to allowing President Putman to determine appropriate timing for such a hire, based on need and budgetary considerations, with approval to be considered by the Board.

Thanksgiving Week – Board unanimously approved motion (by Rachel/seconded by Cindy) that the entire week of Thanksgiving be paid time-off for all staff.

December Board meeting – Board was advised that the December Board meeting has been tentatively scheduled for Dec. 9-10, 2026 in the Chicago area at the Morton Arboretum. Jon Hicks noted that the Wright Tree Board meeting is on Dec. 11, and may pose a conflict for he and Kyle McCann. Executive Session adjourned at 3:00pm

Minutes drafted with CoPilot AI and adjusted by PGP. Executive Session minutes by DG.

Approved: September 3, 2026