PENNSYLVANIA DISTILLED SPIRITS INDUSTRY PROMOTION PROGRAM
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
2301 North Cameron St.
Harrisburg, PA 17110
Minutes of the November 5, 2025 Board Meeting

Public notice of the November 5, 2025 Pennsylvania Distilled Spirits Industry Promotion Program Meeting was given as stipulated by the Sunshine Law.

CALL TO ORDER

Russell Fletcher, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Board members in attendance along with Chair Fletcher included, Vice Chair Terri Gillespie, Co-Treasurer Ellen Hough, Co-Treasurer Alex Moser, and Gregg Feaster

Also Present: Adam Morris, Esquire, Assistant Counsel; Michael Keefe, Commodities Program Manager; Karen Powell, Chief of Marketing Division; Tracy Barone, Acting Director, Bureau of Market Development; Arthur Etchells, Pennsylvania Distillers Guild; Frenchie Cline, Administrative Assistant, Bureau of Markets; Libby Bainbridge, Bureau of Markets.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-15 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by: **Terri Gillespie**

Second: **Gregg Feaster**

Passed: **Unanimously**

To approve June 26, 2025 meeting Minutes.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES AT PDA

Tracy Barone, Acting Director, Bureau of Market Development, introduced herself and Karen Powell. She noted, between the two of them, they would be providing oversight of the commodity boards for the foreseeable future.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Michael Keefe, Commodities Program Manager, assumed the Chair position for the Election of Officers.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-16 - ELECTION OF CHAIR

Motion by: **Terri Gillespie**

Second: **Gregg Feaster**

Passed: **Unanimously**

To elect Russell Fletcher as Chair of the Pennsylvania Distilled Spirits Industry Promotion Board.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-17 - ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Motion by: **Ellen Hough**

Second: **Gregg Feaster**

Passed: **Unanimously**

To elect Terri Gillespie as Vice Chair of the Pennsylvania Distilled Spirits Industry Promotion Board.

Russell Fletcher assumed the Chair.

Chair Fletcher asked if the Board needed to elect a treasurer. Mr. Keefe explained, with the way funds move through the Board, all the work of a treasurer is accomplished through PDA, so a treasurer would not be necessary. Mr. Keefe stated the Board could appoint subcommittees as needed to conduct specific tasks. He reminded the Board, if a subcommittee was created, meetings would need to be published publicly under the Sunshine Act.

SCHEDULE 2026 MEETINGS

Michael Keefe, Commodities Program Manager, noted in 2026, five meetings were held in February, April, May, June, and November. The Board discussed the reason for each of the scheduled meetings. Mr. Keefe noted the February meeting for other boards depends on what business the Board has to discuss. He suggested meetings in April, June, and November were necessary.

Mr. Moser requested the in-person meeting be held earlier in the year and not in the fourth-quarter. It was agreed the June meeting would be an in-person meeting.

Mr. Keefe suggested two meetings near April would be appropriate. A late March or early April meeting would allow review of the first round of proposals, at which time the RFP would have been open for six weeks. A late April or early May meeting would allow the Board to review ongoing project progress reports. The June meeting would allow the Board to make an educated decision on what direction to take with regards to research or marketing.

It was decided the 2026 meetings would be virtual April 8, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; virtual May 13, 10 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.; in-person June 24, 10:00 to 4:00 p.m.; and virtual November 4, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Later in the meeting, the Board determined the 2026 dates would be changed to accommodate a meeting in January or February. The meeting date would be determined by a number of factors including the passage of the state budget and signing of the Bull Moose contract. The decision was made to cancel the April 8, 2026 meeting and extend the May 13, 2026 meeting to 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. The changing of meeting dates allows for the RFP to be posted later than January.

REVIEW SURVEY FEEDBACK AND 2027 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFPS) TIMELINE AND PRIORITIES

Michael Keefe, Commodities Program Manager, reported PDA had compiled the results of the Pennsylvania Distilled Spirits Industry Survey. He provided a packet to the Board reflecting a visualization of the data. He noted there were both qualitative and quantitative questions, allowing participants to provide specific answers.

Ms. Hough asked if the survey results could be provided to Bull Moose. Mr. Keefe stated the data was anonymized, so it should be able to be shared; however, he would follow-up to confirm.

Mr. Keefe noted the map of the survey had overlay in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Ms. Hough commented it was expected given the number of distilleries in both cities.

Ms. Hough stated the results were focused on events and regional promotion. She suggested tailoring the next RFP towards marketing firms who come up with clever ideas to promote events and regions. Mr. Feaster noted a need for events around Bedford, PA. Ms. Hough added history could be a highlight of the marketing.

Chair Fletcher added the PA 250 celebrations would lean in to the history aspect and would continue into 2027. Ms. Hough stated marketers could see what is successful with PA 250 and continue moving forward with their proposals.

Mr. Moser asked if there was a way to get Fine Wine and Good Spirits to buy into the Pennsylvania promotion as a sales outlet. Mr. Keefe stated the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (PLCB) has their own business plans and marketing. He added the Board's marketing would be supplemental in trying to drive people towards the sales outlets. Chair Fletcher reported on his recent conversations with PLCB people regarding label approvals. He thought PLCB might be open to conversations.

Mr. Keefe had two responses to Chair Fletcher. The first was to remind the Board, as current projects expire and submit final progress reports, the Board had a duty to complete and submit a report to Legislature on the work of the Board. The second was to note the Board members are appointed by legislators and therefore have a direct line of contact with the Legislature. He added, officially, the Board cannot conduct lobbying efforts. The Board has to follow the rules of the program, which are to communicate with the legislature and to recommend projects for funding.

Ms. Hough noted the Pennsylvania Distillers Guild plans to talk with PLCB. Ms. Gillespie stated the Board's job is to promote spirits within the Commonwealth, give people opportunities to showcase their products, and provide data that people can present to the PLCB.

Mr. Keefe encouraged the individual Board members to partner with the Guild for lobbying. He stressed lobbying cannot be Board business.

Mr. Keefe directed conversation back to the survey and noted the Board was pulling out certain trends from the data. He reminded the Board there were two RFPs in the previous year, one for a statewide marketing campaign and one for a general call for proposals. He noted the statewide marketing campaign had been awarded to Bull Moose. He stated Bull Moose would be creating a statewide branding campaign with a logo and other materials in a toolkit, which could be shared with distilleries and used in social media. He added one RFP route would be to make a strategy for the execution of the statewide marketing campaign using the survey responses and partnering with regional tourism agencies. A second route would be to do a different campaign with a different entity.

Mr. Keefe noted the RFP could be written to guide proposals in a way that captures the survey results. He suggested the Board consider a single RFP instead of two separate RFPs.

Ms. Hough liked the approach of continuing to build off of the statewide campaign while also responding to the survey to build regional programs off of the statewide. Chair Fletcher agreed with Ms. Hough. He suggested communicating with Bull Moose to see the direction Bull Moose plans on once the contract is signed.

Mr. Keefe noted the project start date for Bull Moose was five months ago. Due to the budget impasse, the contract had not been signed. He added a presentation from Bull Moose once they're able to start would be helpful, but it would be after the RFP proposals have been submitted. He recommended the Board consider an RFP, which would continue the Bull Moose statewide campaign as the Board already agreed to spend money in the creation of the campaign.

Members of the Board and Mr. Keefe discussed the current and potential delays due to the state budget. It was noted the Board could not ask Bull Moose for information on the campaign until after a contract is signed and receipts are turned in. Ms. Barone noted Bull Moose would likely have to retool their timeline due to the delay. She added the Board could speak to Bull Moose after the contract is accepted.

The Board and PDA staff discussed the RFP timeline and if the RAP could be postponed, allowing the Board time to speak with Bull Moose. Ms. Hough supported the idea of waiting for the budget to pass to allow the Board to be better informed on Bull Moose's plans prior to publishing the RFP.

Mr. Keefe explained there were three possible versions of an RFP he could prepare. One would be a new creative process or general call. The second possibility would depend on the budget passing and the Board speaking to Bull Moose regarding the direction of the campaign. The third possibility would combine the second suggestion with the survey feedback.

Mr. Feaster asked if the Board was permitted to inform Bull Moose about coming to a Board meeting. Ms. Barone asked for clarification on where Bull Moose was in the RFP process. She stated she did not see a problem with the Board inviting them to speak. She added if there was not a quorum, Board members could call Bull Moose to give them a heads-up. She noted no future RFP plans could be discussed and no decisions can be made. She suggested only two Board members chat with Bull Moose to inform Bull Moose the Board would like to speak with them about what plans Bull Moose has for the campaign. The Board might then have a better indicator of how to move forward with the next RFP.

Ms. Hough commented she was concerned about the number of science-based research proposals received last year. She stressed the RFP focus should be on promotion of Pennsylvania distilleries and spirits with a focus on regions, potentially working with destination marketing organizations (DMOs).

Discussion ensued regarding meeting in late January or early February, contingent on when the state budget passes and providing Bull Moose the opportunity to provide feedback on their campaign. The Board discussed the various regions and DMOs in Pennsylvania. Ms. Barone provided information from her time working as a DMO director. She also explained how the RFP could be written in a way to open it up for DMO's and tourism offices to write proposals.

Ms. Hough mentioned how much she likes it when Visit Pittsburgh promoted Liberty Pole. She added it will be fun to see what Bull Moose comes up with. Ms. Barone noted DMO's fall under the umbrella of the Pennsylvania Restaurant Lodging Association (PRLA), which might be able to create a proposal. Ms. Hough added with the delay in releasing the RFP in February instead of January, PRLA might be able to build off of existing plans.

Mr. Keefe commented having a parent agency execute ideas on a regional mini-grant level would make sense. He noted the catch would be the amount of money spent to cover a person's salary, which would take funds away from the specific work.

Mr. Keefe recapped the decisions made including scheduling a virtual meeting, inviting Bull Moose for feedback, and drafting three potential RFPs for the Board to vote on after speaking with Bull Moose. He estimated tentatively posting the RFP in late February. Based on the delay in posting, the Board decided to eliminate the previously determined April meeting.

Mr. Keefe requested the Board take a motion to direct PDA to develop three drafts of the RFP for 2027 in preparation of the next meeting.

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-18 - RFP DRAFTS

Motion by: **Ellen Hough**

Second: **Terri Gillespie**

Passed: **Unanimously**

To direct PDA the write three RFP drafts, taking into consideration the Board would like to promote Pennsylvania Distilled Spirits based on the proposal given to the Board from the money spent with Bull Moose. The RFPs will be prepared prior to the next meeting, which will take place as soon as Bull Moose signed the contract and ready to begin work.

Mr. Keefe asked if the Board wanted to form a statewide marketing subcommittee. It was decided to not form a subcommittee as all of the Board members would want to be involved.

RECESS

The Board recessed for lunch from 11:25 a.m. until 12:15 p.m.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Hough reviewed the Guild survey from July 2024. She added it was interesting to compare the Guild survey with the survey the Board just had. She offered to provide the Guild survey to the rest of the Board if they wanted the information.

Ms. Hough asked if PDA could provide information on how much money had been awarded for past proposals, how much money was left and what kind of admin costs were associated with the Board and with proposals. Mr. Keefe will work on a budget update for the Board. He briefly reviewed the proposal amounts for GK Visual's documentary, Visit Pittsburgh's project and Bull Moose's statewide campaign. It was noted the projects roughly totaled $1.2 million leaving a balance of about $800,000 to be added to the 2027 RFP amount.

Mr. Keefe noted admin costs incurred by the Board were minimal. He added proposals can include indirect costs of around ten percent.

Mr. Keefe shared PDA has been working on an online commodities research database. The database will be publicly available, allowing entities to review research projects funded by the various commodity boards. The database will also provide a way for the Boards to show how money is being invested.

The Board discussed the scoring matrix used to score proposals. Mr. Keefe explained the matrix used the previous year had five equally weighted categories: Feasibility; support and participation from the industry; innovation; expected outcomes and impacts; and methodology. Ms. Powell stated the categories and scoring weights could be adjusted prior to the RFP being published. Ms. Gillespie suggested pulling weight from the methodology if the Board is considering promotional proposals more than research proposals.

Board members discussed innovation versus creativity. It was decided the Board would revisit the matrix after the RFP had been chosen. Mr. Keefe will send the scorecard to the Board for review prior to the next meeting. Mr. Keefe noted it may be important to consider how marketing firms measure their success when deciding between proposals. He noted the Board can eliminate categories or change them based on what they consider important.

Mr. Keefe reviewed the homework both the Board members and PDA in preparation for a meeting early in 2026.

Mr. Moser asked if the Board had specific definitions for the five scorecard categories. Mr. Keefe stated the RFP should stay standard without specific definitions; however, the Board could discuss what the definitions mean to each of them in general. Ms. Gillespie mentioned the definition could shift depending on the proposal.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Arthur Etchells, Pennsylvania Distillers Guild commented Pennsylvania distillers are working to make Pennsylvania rye whiskey the official spirit of Pennsylvania. He noted it would support PDA's PA Preferred mission. He added the Guild is looking for geographic specific rye whiskies.

Mr. Keefe noted the survey had two related questions regarding Pennsylvania grains. Two-thirds of respondents stated they source PA grown grains. A similar amount responded they did not require any technical assistance in sourcing PA grains. He added there is a 75 percent threshold where 75 percent of ingredients used needed to span 75 percent of their life or growth cycle in Pennsylvania as part of the PA Preferred program.

ADJOURNMENT

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-19 - MOTION TO ADJOURN

Motion by: **Ellen Hough**

Second: **Gregg Feaster**

Passed: **Unanimously**

There being no further business, the PA Distilled Spirits Industry Promotion Program Meeting adjourned at 12:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Laurie Elliott

Laurie Elliott

November 5, 2025