

2025 Conference First-Time Attendee Task Force Final Report



July 8, 2025

Prepared by **Angelika Williams,**
Task Force Chair



The NASFAA Conference First-Time Attendee Task Force Steering Committee was assembled by NASFAA staff, the Task Force Chair, and the Board of Directors Representative, ensuring a diversity of representation across institutional type, region, and professional background. This group was charged with supporting and enhancing the experience of first-time attendees at the NASFAA 2025 National Conference, held June 24-27, 2025, in Anaheim, California.

This year, the task force built on previous efforts by focusing on expanding connection and inclusion opportunities for all first-time attendees. Participants were able to connect with others before the conference through NASFAA Communities powered by Slack. At the conference, the First-Time Attendee Kick-Off Networking Event & Dessert Reception on Tuesday, June 24, served as a welcoming space for community building and fun. Our mission remained clear: help new attendees feel seen, supported, and equipped to navigate the conference and the financial aid profession with confidence. With a strong focus on mentorship, networking, and engagement, we provided a space where everyone, no matter how they entered the profession, could grow together. Our initiatives included the planning and execution of the First-Time Attendee Kick-Off Networking Event, management of the mentor/mentee program, and targeted communications to enhance participation and inclusion.

Chair: Angelika Williams, University of San Francisco

Steering Committee Members:

- John Bender, NASFAA Board of Directors Representative
- Kemmoree Duncombe, Kirtland Community College, Activities
- Wilma Porter, Oakland Community College, Mentor/Mentee Partnering
- Kevin McCrary, Bethune-Cookman University, Mentor/Mentee Partnering
- Vandeen Mckenzie, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Communications
- Wendi Owens, University of Miami, Activities
- Eudelia Gomez, Texas A&M University–San Antonio, Communications
- Audra Main, Moore Norman Technology Center, Mentor/Mentee Partnering
- Ben Montecillo, University of Houston, Activities
- Tina Jara, Nevada State University, Activities
- Elizabeth Amador, University of New Mexico, Mentor/Mentee Partnering

NASFAA Staff Liaisons:

- Sarah Austin, Logistics
- Kochie Vaughan, Logistics

Conference Mentors:

Mary Kay Aston, Raisl Davis, Angelika Williams, Joan Bailey, LeChelle Hunt Davenport, Tina Jara, Robin Ralston, Elizabeth Amador, De Rodrick Jonkins, Lucy Candal-Fernandez, Tanya Patterson-Stanley, Wendi Owens, Deuantha Cosme, Jasmine Jaywant, Eufemia Aquino, Shashanta James, Justin Chase Brown, Lawrence McGhee, Eduardo Magallan, Ben Montecillo, Audra Main, Alexis Brown, Susan Stephenson, Nick Valdivia, Kemmoree Duncombe, Vandeen McKenzie, Consuela Perez, Kumba McGill, Brittany Tweed, Tommy Holiwell, Rodrick Andrews, Angelika Williams, Wilma Porter, Kevin McCrary, Zachary Christian

Virtual Meetings:

- March 25, 2025 (Chair & NASFAA staff only)
- April 16, 2025
- April 30, 2025
- May 14, 2025
- May 28, 2025
- June 11, 2025 (Task force and all mentors)

Communication: Task force members worked closely with NASFAA to send targeted messages, including:

- A welcome email and event details to all first-time attendees
- A solicitation email to returning attendees to serve as mentors
- Email templates for mentor outreach to mentees
- Posts for NASFAA's Today's News
- Posts for the Slack NASFAA 2025 channel for conference attendees

Mentor/Mentee Program: Mentees and mentors were matched based on region, institution type, and FAM system. Matches were finalized by June 15, 2025. Last-minute pairings were accommodated onsite at the networking event.

Networking Event: The First-Time Attendees Kick-Off Networking Event was held on Tuesday, June 24, 2025, from 12:30 to 1:45 p.m. in Room 204 AB at the Anaheim Convention Center.

Agenda: Steering Committee members and mentors arrived at noon, set up the room, placed materials (buttons, pens, Bingo cards), and assisted the mentor/mentee team with day-of requests.

12:30-12:40 p.m.: Dessert Reception

Angelika welcomed attendees informally
Attendees enjoyed dessert
Mentors circulated and greeted attendees

12:40-12:50 p.m.: Welcome Messages

Angelika introduced the event purpose and acknowledged the Task Force and mentors.
Introductions: Melanie Storey (NASFAA President & CEO), Kristi Jovell (NASFAA National Chair)

12:50-1:30 p.m.: Activities

Wendi led door prize activity (button stickers)
Activity 1 (12:55-1:05 p.m.): Human Bingo led by Wendi
Activity 2 (1:08-1:25 p.m.): Colleague Connection Networking led by Ben (speed networking by region)
Brief debriefs after each activity

1:30 p.m.: Closing Remarks

Angelika thanked attendees, encouraged attending the Perspectives of Belonging session at 2:00 p.m. (Room 210 AB), invited attendees to continue mingling and connecting

Feedback & Suggestions:

- Develop a plan to limit the number of day-of mentor sign-ups; find a way to get more to sign up in advance of the onsite conference.
- Develop a more organized way to match day-of mentor sign-ups so that the mentor and mentee can meet in person right away, rather than coordinating the sharing of contact information during the conference.
- The activities were great – participants were lively and appreciated the large number of prizes!
- The refreshments were well received, and the amount/quantity was perfect.
- When the activities require a lot of movement/walking around, there could be fewer tables and chairs, except maybe more on the perimeter of the room.
- The networking event was a success! Mentors and mentees were talking and getting to know each other long after the event ended.
- Consider having a “first-time attendee” Slack channel to help facilitate the informal meetups (like dinner, Disney night, etc.).

Thank you to every task force member, mentor, and first-time attendee who helped make this initiative a success!