Scientific Earthquake Studies Advisory Committee (SESAC) Fall 2026 Meeting: Minutes
minutes were chair certified for accuracy on 10/19/2026

Session 1: *Wednesday, September 9, 9a-11:30a ET*
9:00a – Welcome, logistics
9:10a – Introductory remarks, Q&A
10:00a – State of the Program (Gavin Hayes)
11:00a – Discussion

11:30a - Break

Session 2: *Wednesday, September 9, 1:00-5p ET*
1:00p – Special Presentation – External Research Portfolio Review
1:30p – Open Discussion (Hamburger to moderate)
2:30p – Break
3:00p – ANSS Update
3:30p – Discussion
4:00p – NSHM Update
4:30p – Discussion

Committee members present: Michael Hamburger, Tim Melbourne, Maureen Long, Anne Meltzer, Ramon Arrowsmith, Mike Oskin, Aaron Velasco

USGS: Gavin Hayes, Morgan Moschetti, Christine Goulet, Cynthia Martinez, Cecily Wolfe, Mike Blanpied, Allison Faris, Liz Hearn, Bill Barnhart, Jill Franks, Lindsay Davis, Brian Shiro

Guests: Linda Rowan (Congressional Research Services), Jon Stewart (UCLA; session 2), Luciana Astiz (NSF)
USGS Guests: Andi Ellis, Nico Luco (session 2)

Notes:
Session 1

After introductions, Director Mamula provided remarks to the committee, thanking them for their service, and commenting that he was looking forward to their annual report. He noted the visibility of work from the Earthquake Program, the international mission, ensuring USGS and the Nation are ready for the next damaging earthquake, and alignment with Administration priorities in life safety.

- Questions and discussion about how the SESAC can be most effective in support of USGS and EHP. NM responded noting USGS must improve how it advertises its role, the need for recruitment, and need to support improvement to earth science and hazards education. NM referenced support for Executive and Secretary's Orders, and alignment with public safety and national security interests.

- After the Director's departure, Cynthia Martinez, the newly appointed Associate Director for the USGS Natural Hazards Mission Area, introduced herself to the committee and thanked them for their invaluable advice.

Gavin Hayes summarized the state of the Program, including a review of the program structure, recently budgets, staffing, NEHRP activities (including movement towards a potential reauthorization), past SESAC recommendations, the external research grants and portfolio review, pressure on the external grants budget, and other program highlights.

- Questions and discussion about the potential for hiring and student/post-doc recruitment; GH responded with some details of limited hiring opportunities, the potential for upcoming hires at ESC, and information about active student recruitment programs. SESAC members expressed concern over the size of the ShakeAlert budget in comparison to the rest of the program (ShakeAlert is now >1/3 of the EHP budget; monitoring 2/3 overall, including ShakeAlert); GH responded with further information. The committee discussed concerns surrounding workforce development. SESAC also asked about EHP investment in geohazards research centers (SCEC, CRESCENT, etc.); GH responded with details. SESAC asked about international activities; GH discussed new partnerships with the State Department, a topic that will be discussed further on Day 2 of this meeting.

Session 2

The afternoon session began with an overview of EHP's external portfolio review given by Jill Franks, and the soon-to-be-published summary document describing the review process and resulting action items.

- Questions and discussion about the impact of Congressional directives on funding for the the program. Given the prospect of continued stress on the funding available for the external portfolio, discussion emphasized the importance of a Return-on-Investment (ROI) analysis, for both grants and research cooperative agreements. The committee discussed the impact of SCEC funding over the past 35 years, and the benefit of leveraged NSF investment and community engagement. The committee also discussed other recommended changes, including providing clearer and uniform guidance to grant review panels, shortening proposals, and the balance of 1- vs 2-year awards. The panel asked about leverage opportunities for grant solicitations (e.g., with NSF), and the future of the grants program given reductions in funding. The committee is strongly supportive of grants funding, and plans to include recommendations for support in their annual report.

Maureen Long provided an update from the ANSS Steering Committee, overseeing EHP monitoring activities. The update discussed staff shortages across EHP operational projects, including NEIC 24x7 staff. The presentation also included updates on ANSS activities, web statistics, and ShakeAlert. There will be an upcoming panel to review ShakeAlert (planned for ~Spring 2027) as it approaches completion at the end of this calendar year.

- Questions and discussion about the impacts of reduced 24x7 staffing capacity, and how the issue will be managed. GH, BB, and CG responded. The committee discussed Android Earthquake Alerts, its relation to ShakeAlert, independent warning capabilities elsewhere, and information on system performance (there is little available). GH responded. The committee also asked about cross-border issues for ShakeAlert between the US and Canada.

A discussion session followed. SESAC discussed ideas for their FY26 annual report, including general approach, and some specific topics.

After a break, the committee reconvened for an update from the National Seismic Hazard Model Steering Committee, by Nico Luco, Mike Blanpied, and Jonathan Stewart (joining remotely). Jon noted that he chairs the Provisions Update Committee (PUC) that creates the NEHRP Provisions, and that it is not a given that the NSHM is adopted—it is a long and detailed process. He also reflected on the importance of a participatory review process, which begins at the start of the project.

- Questions and discussion about the inclusion (lack thereof) of induced seismicity in the NHSM. NL discussed previous one-year updates focused on Induced Seismicity. GH discussed past unsuccessful funding requests for Induced Seismicity. MB noted that developments in Time Dependent Hazard & Risk Forecasting will provide tools and methods for Induced Seismicity Hazard Analysis. The committee also discussed key NSHM-related topics to include in the SESAC annual report. JS noted that reductions in model epistemic uncertainty reduces hazard fractiles and mean hazard, and reduces cost of construction. NL noted EHP is well positioned to address secondary hazard needs called out in NEHRP reauthorization language, but that additional resources would be required to do so.

Session 3: *Thursday, September 10, 9a-10:30a ET*
9:00a – Welcome, logistics
9:10a – NEPEC Update
9:40a – Discussion

10:30a - Break

Session 4: *Thursday, September 10, 11a-1p ET*
11:00a – Special Presentation – International Portfolio
11:30a – Open Discussion (Hamburger to moderate)
1p - Close

Committee members present: Michael Hamburger, Tim Melbourne, Maureen Long, Anne Meltzer, Ramon Arrowsmith, Mike Oskin, Aaron Velasco

USGS: Gavin Hayes, Morgan Moschetti, Christine Goulet, Cynthia Martinez, Cecily Wolfe, Mike Blanpied, Allison Faris, Liz Hearn, Bill Barnhart, Jill Franks, Lindsay Davis, Brian Shiro

Guests: Linda Rowan (Congressional Research Services),
USGS Guests: Gari Mayberry, Cassandra Smith (session 4)

Notes:
Session 3

Ramon Arrowsmith presented an overview of activities from the National Earthquake Prediction Evaluation Council (NEPEC), which was reconstituted this year, and has met several times to discuss important themes relevant to USGS earthquake forecasting efforts, including Artificial Intelligence and its use for forecasting, megaquake advisories and pre-positioning information for messaging after unusual seismic activity in the Cascadia subduction zone.

- Questions and discussion from the committee about requirements for prediction testing, the increasing use of ML/AI and how related forecasts should be handled, and communications approaches to unusual activity in the Cascadia subduction zone. GH noted that Cascadia has very low background seismicity, so anything that happens there will require enhanced communication beyond OAF. The committee also discussed the benefits of NEPEC updating 2016 guidance from the committee on the topic of earthquake prediction, and perhaps publishing as a peer-reviewed paper. This topic was followed by a discussion of the role of SESAC in relation to sub-committee deliberations and activities.

Session 4

Lindsay Davis presented an overview of the EHP international portfolio, and the Department of State-funded Earthquake Disaster Assistance Team (EDAT), now authorized under a new Interagency Agreement with DoS. LD discussed the nature of EDAT work, provided details on some specific projects, and challenges and opportunities.

- Questions and discussion from the committee about EDAT, the committee role (GH responded that EHP welcomes advice), staffing challenges, earthquake response activities and broader community efforts (GH responded with discussion of the USGS role under NEHRP), timelines for humanitarian vs scientific response, coordination with community groups like GEER (NSF funded Geotechnical Extreme Events Reconnaissance), and other associated activities like those of GEM (Global Earthquake Model). LD, GH, and others responded to questions with clarifying details.

- MH led a discussion of the FY26 SESAC report with the committee. The committee noted their desire for the report to be concise, and discussed priority topics, including: the importance of research underlying all aspects of the program; the risk of redirected budgets on external research grant activities; continued staffing pressure and a lack of hiring; and the importance of workforce development.