



IRE Board of Directors Conference Call *October 26, 2017 at 2 p.m. EDT*

Board members in attendance: Matt Goldberg, president; Cheryl W. Thompson, vice president; Andrew Donohue, treasurer; Ellen Gabler, secretary; Lee Zurik, executive committee; Matt Apuzzo; Ziva Branstetter; Sarah Cohen; T. Christian Miller, Steven Rich; Jill Riepenhoff; Nicole Vap; and Phil Williams.

Staff in attendance: Doug Haddix, executive director; Amy Johnston, membership director; Lauren Grandestaff, Resource Center director and contest coordinator

Previous Minutes

Haddix asked the board if they needed more time to review the minutes from the September board retreat. Goldberg and several other said they would like more time. Haddix replied that they would wait to vote on the minutes until the next board meeting.

Contest Committee – Riepenhoff

Everyone should have received the information regarding the changes. Lauren Grandestaff is also on the call and can help answer any questions you might have. The recommendation is to make the following changes:

PROPOSED CHANGE: Print/Online

- **Division I:** Newspapers with +400k circulation (largest single day, including digital replica); wire services; network or syndicated TV; magazines, weeklies and online-only media with a national audience. For partnerships or collaborations, please enter by largest organization involved.
- **Division II:** Newspapers with 200,000-399,999 circulation (largest single day, including digital replica); Top 20 television markets; magazines, weeklies and online-only media with a regional audience. For partnerships or collaborations, please enter by largest organization involved.
- **Division III:** Newspapers with 75,000-199,999 circulation (largest single day, including digital replica); 21-50 television markets; magazines, weeklies and online-only media with a state-wide audience. For partnerships or collaborations, please enter by largest organization involved.
- **Division IV:** Newspapers with less than 74,999 circulation (largest single day, including digital replica); Below 50 television markets; magazines, weeklies, and online-only organizations with a city, county or metropolitan area focus. For partnerships or collaborations, please enter by largest organization involved.

Donohue asked if Riepenhoff how this proposal was different from the proposal that was discussed at the board retreat. The changes reflect four categories for newspapers based on circulation (the board in September approved category sizes for four broadcast categories and other awards changes).

Riepenhoff replied that not much had changed. She said she had spoken with former IRE Executive

Director Mark Horvit to get some input from him and he said that given the state of newspapers, it is going to be a moving target every year. Horvit also said that it's important to be able to verify.

Cohen said that when they were working on the proposal, they tried to figure out if we could use traffic or website visits. However, we found that those are not audited number and are often not given out. This is why we decided to go with more traditional numbers.

In terms of online media, Jill spoke with Mark Horvit about the issue of staff size, since we had initially talked about breaking this down by staff size. Mark was staunchly against using the staff size rather than the audience. Riepenhoff then went on to talk about groups like the Marshall Project and their staff size.

Gabler asked about groups like InsideClimate. Cohen said she had looked at groups similar to that and that they are larger than what most people would think.

Apuzzo said that he didn't have any questions about the hierarchy but noted that he wasn't aware that this was being discussed at the retreat and that he also had not seen any research on this prior to the email that was sent out about the board call. He said that it was hard for him to speak to this even though he is on the committee.

Riepenhoff responded that it was her understanding that the contest committee was to judge the contest, and exploring changes in category sizes was something that Goldberg had asked her to look into last year. Goldberg said that this wasn't for the whole committee, this was for Jill to do as follow-up from the board retreat.

Cohen discussed past issues regarding size and the reason this issue was being addressed. She went on to say that when they look at how to break things up, there were four natural breaks. When they decided to break the broadcast into four groups, it only seemed fair to break the newspaper groups into four categories.

Williams asked if there was anything in writing that reflects the changes from the board retreat. Goldberg said that information was included in the invite that Doug sent out regarding the call. Cohen said the changes were mainly to the category names.

Donohue noted that to him it felt more newspaper centric and that we are very specific with the newspapers but vague on the other groups. Cohen asked what else they could use. Donohue asked if the newspapers could be similar to the other groups. Cohen replied that there had been problems with some newspapers playing a bit loose with the numbers.

Miller said that he thought it was a good breakdown and that the categories seemed fair. He then asked how they determined the national breaks. Cohen said that it was very gut feeling and that it was done more to avoid unfairness that has come up over the last few years.

Donohue asked if they did any sort of breakdown on what this would mean for magazines, online publications, etc. Cohen said they had looked at those and that she also looked at staff size and what resources there were. She went on to note that there wasn't a whole lot of information to go in looking at those. Donohue said he thought it would be good to have those numbers. Cohen replied that they don't report that. Donohue responded that they created groups based on something.

Riepenhoff noted that this isn't that different than what we have done before.

Cohen said that since her first year on the board, there have been several attempts to fix the categories and every attempt failed, which is why we ended up with national, regional, etc. categories. Donohue replied that we are only having this conversation about the newspaper categories and not other groups. Cohen replied that we don't get many entries for those groups.

Miller asked Donohue what his thinking was on this. Miller replied that his thinking has been to create a mission statement rather than twisting ourselves into pretzels. We are only looking at newspapers, not necessarily weeklies and online.

Gabler said she likes the changes that they had made and that it cleared up some things. To Donohue's point, there might be some questions regarding the online entries. Is that something that the contest committee will be moving as necessary? Cohen responded that the committee can move things if they are in the wrong category. Grandstaff explained the options that the committee has to move entries.

Haddix reminded everyone that they had received a spreadsheet report with a breakdown of all the different categories and organizations that entered previous contests at the board retreat in September.

Donohue said his point was how would those groups be affected. Cohen said there really wouldn't be any effect on those groups. There aren't many regionals, we don't have an exact count but maybe only one or two people would be affected.

Goldberg asked if the consensus was that everyone was OK with this, are we mostly OK with it but still want to make some tweaks, or do we oppose this?

Rich said he was OK with the proposal but had a question regarding where ProPublica Illinois would fit. Riepenhoff asked if they only cover Illinois. Branstetter said that if they are using the resources and partnering with the main office, then they would fall under partnerships. Rich replied that they will be doing some projects together and some on their own. Cohen asked if it should be compared to the Associated Press, if so then we would consider them a bureau.

Discussion ensued regarding partnerships.

Gabler said that she wanted to make sure that in the future we don't feel pressure to make changes just to make sure everyone gets an award. She said she understand the need for different categories but wanted to make sure that we making these changes for the right reasons. Cohen said that it's not about everyone getting an award, it's about putting like-sized newsrooms together in the competition.

Goldberg asked for further questions or comments.

MOTION – Approve the new categories as proposed. Motion made by Cohen; seconded by Williams.

The board approved the motion 11-2. Voting yes were Branstetter, Cohen, Gabler, Goldberg, Miller, Rich, Riepenhoff, Thompson, Vap, Williams and Zurik. Voting against the motion were Apuzzo and Donohue.

Cohen said that she would like to make the recommendation that Apuzzo and Donohue work together on suggestions for the next contest year. Apuzzo said that he didn't feel like he completely understand why this needed to be changed and didn't feel comfortable voting for it. Cohen replied that for those that are uncomfortable with this, any suggestions you can make will be appreciated. This has been such an issue for so many years, so any suggestions you have would be good. Donohue said that he would be happy to work on this.

Goldberg noted that this is something that as the media changes, this may be something we need to have the committee continually review.

Williams said he didn't think this would ever get easier or that there will be a great solution. He went on to suggest looking at the screening and maybe look at these more like the Polk awards. Cohen said she thought they would need to take that to the membership. Maybe not for a vote but to at least get feedback from the membership before doing something like that. She went on to say that she thought we need to be careful about making changes like that because we need to make sure that the small groups are included.

Vap said that she thought we would get fewer entries by doing something like that. Cohen agreed with Vap and said that is why we need to work with the membership to gauge what the membership would feel is fair.

Goldberg said he thought that is why the awards committee needs to continue looking at these in the future and suggested maybe a co-chair could look at this.

Vap and others thanked the contest committee for their work.

Cohen asked Grandestaff if she had everything she needed. Grandestaff said she did, and she was happy to talk with any of the board that might have questions or be looking for resources.

Goldberg asked Haddix if there was any other business. Haddix replied that he did not have anything else.

Goldberg told the group that for the IRE Conference in Orlando, the hotel will be hosting a dinner just for the board. The dinner will be Wednesday evening in the tasting room at the hotel. This is something that the hotel has offered to do for the board.

Several board members expressed appreciation for Stephanie Klimstra, IRE director of events, especially for her work on national conferences.

Meeting adjourned at 2:43 p.m. EDT.