

# **IRE Board of Directors Meeting**

## **June 14, 2018 — Orlando, Florida**

In attendance: Matt Goldberg, Ellen Gabler, Lee Zurik, Steven Rich, Phil Williams, Jill Riepenhoff, Sarah Cohen, Nicole Vap, T. Christian Miller, Ziva Branstetter, Andy Donohue (via phone), Cheryl W. Thompson

Absent: Matt Apuzzo

Staff in attendance: Doug Haddix, Heather Feldmann Henry, Stephanie Klimstra, Chris Vachon, Lauren Grandestaff, Charles Minshew, Mark Walker, Cody Winchester

Haddix calls meeting to order at 2:07 p.m.

### **Action Items**

#### **Previous minutes — Haddix**

Motion to approve minutes from Feb. 6, 2018 call (not Feb. 18, 2018, as in the agenda) — made by Goldberg, seconded by Gabler. Unanimously approved.

#### **Bylaws addition — Haddix**

Section 5.07 — “A copy of The IRE Journal shall be sent to each member of Investigative Reporters & Editors.”

This change came about because IRE had lost its periodical mailing rate, which made mailing more expensive. Sarah Hutchins led effort to renew periodical status, which requires this language. Members were given 30 days to comment on the change; four or five questions, plus six comments in support of the change.

Motion to approve bylaw addition made by Williams, seconded by Riepenhoff. Unanimously approved.

#### **Budget for fiscal 2018-19 — Haddix & Heather Feldmann Henry**

Haddix: IRE is in excellent financial shape going forward. Estimates that we will end current fiscal year in June with surplus of around \$45,000; last year \$34,000 surplus was projected. Per

board policy, half of surplus will go into rainy day reserve fund, which is around \$540,000; we're close to achieving the \$600,000 goal of board.

Fiscal year ends June 30; conference is one of largest revenue boosts, so it's hard to make an exact projection because it depends on conference attendance, expenses, etc.

Individual donations have increased by 18%; good bump from last year, which was also up. Conference sponsorships were just over \$301,000 for both conferences this past year, roughly same as last year. Tronc newspaper cities didn't sponsor conferences, but Vachon and others have helped find other sponsorships to keep costs low for attendees.

Zurik asked about research desk, what the issue with revenue was this past year, why it decreased. Haddix said it's gone up and down, Reuters had large contract for two years. Henry said they reduced their yearly contract from \$60,000 to \$20,000 to \$5,000. Haddix said recent marketing campaign for "Hire IRE" has helped and been shared over past few months.

Cohen asked how many students worked on research desk this past year; Lauren Grandestaff said just one graduate student worked on research desk. Haddix said student staff can expand as desk expands.

Zurik said recent marketing campaign was great, but needs strategic plan and more people to send it to; services are affordable, and he knows lots of newsrooms would take advantage of them if they knew they were there. Vap suggested short webinar to show people what's available. Zurik suggested that member services could expand marketing for newsroom training, data services, research desk.

Donohue asked about \$600,000 goal for reserves. Haddix said that was set years ago as a six-month operation cushion. Henry said it covers salary, benefits, keeps lights on for six months should we need it; this is a standard practice for nonprofits.

Thompson joins meeting at 2:24 p.m.

Williams asked why only half of surplus is moved into reserves instead of whole surplus; Haddix said that's board policy, and the other half gives cushion for beginning of fiscal year. Zurik asked if there's a directive for after the \$600,000 has been reached; Haddix said that should be discussed by the board. Zurik suggested that be added to fall board retreat agenda.

Miller asked if reserves are in a separate account and if they should be moved; Haddix said it's been discussed with endowment committee. Donohue said they evaluated whether to invest in 2015, when policy was passed, and chose not to. Cohen said the idea was that cash should be liquid and available if needed.

Williams asked if Haddix was worried about anything in the budget for the coming year. Haddix said yes — IRE has a good diverse revenue stream, but losing a major grant would have

consequences. Total Newsroom Training grant is built into the budget, 95% sure it will be renewed, but hasn't been yet. Donor is Kohlberg Foundation.

Ford Foundation general operating grant is a \$200,000 18-month grant that runs through the end of May next year. Program officer left Ford Foundation, so are working with a new program officer. Can't apply to that before the fall; budget doesn't include Ford money in final three months of next fiscal year. They've been a good funder and we expect them to stay, but not certain.

Improving economy makes it harder to negotiate hotel deals — it's harder to get room deals, they're increasing rates and there's more competition in hotel business. Overall, financial indicators are positive, Haddix said.

Zurik asked about awards and contests; why revenue is down in that area. Grandestaff said bigger organizations that usually submit 10-20 entries only submitted 5-10 this year. Other organizations didn't enter that they typically would expect. Contest entry is \$55, which is reasonable, but people have to check and decide what contests they want to enter. Quality of work was a lot higher this contest season than in the past couple, awards committee told Grandestaff.

Cohen and Zurik suggested rewriting contest entry form so it's not as difficult to fill out and doesn't scare people away from entering, especially because IRE Awards are one of the first awards with a deadline to enter. Grandestaff said current system requires going through backend developers to change anything on form; hopefully new website will fix that.

Cohen asked about conferences; projecting considerable decline in revenues. Henry said because conference attendance is unknown, especially for the two locations next year, we predict it conservatively.

Williams asked about decline in investment income/operating expenses. Henry said that's grant money and money pulled out for general operations.

Miller asked about DocumentCloud; Haddix said that funding is exhausted and isolated to that one area of budget.

Vap asked about personnel costs; Haddix said IT position was eliminated, and other staff salaries have been rearranged and put under other areas (conferences, rather than general).

Haddix said \$50,000 surplus is expected for next fiscal year, plus \$25,000 of investment earnings that IRE doesn't plan on using.

Cohen asked what would happen if Ford Foundation grant was not renewed. Haddix said we would need to cut expenses or raise revenue in other areas; part of the reason he created Vachon's position is to find new partnerships. Budget is created flexibly in general; \$50,000 is set aside for web/IT expenses, which shouldn't all be needed.

Cohen asked if salaries have been adjusted to be more competitive. Haddix said he's been able to make raises and reclassify some staff who weren't being paid at market rate; his goal is to attract and retain talented staff.

Miller asked about new investigative center, the Howard Center. Haddix said it is not going to be based at MU; other two finalists are Maryland and Arizona State. Haddix and IRE worked with Missouri dean for a proposal and it was a good collaboration.

Motion to approve budget made by Miller, seconded by Vap. Unanimously approved.

### **Endowment Committee appointments — Goldberg**

Nominates Corey Johnson, Jennifer Forsyth, Laura Frank and Norberto Santana Jr.

Appointments moved by Goldberg, seconded by Thompson. Unanimously approved.

### **Enforcement of IRE Principles — Gabler & Goldberg**

Gabler: If someone makes a complaint, they can write it out so they have their version of events recorded, and it will be put in a confidential file. Two tweaks: previous discussions called for only having the board president interview the person who's accused, and would like to change to have two people involved in that for a better situation all around. Other member could be any board member, not just executive committee member.

Miller asked about transparency; will people know the process before they file a complaint? Gabler said if someone complains, we explain, we'll talk about this with executive committee. Don't discuss who it is within committee. Haddix said on advice of attorney, these guidelines should be an internal document on how to operate as an organization. Gabler said they will be transparent about letting people know the process before they file.

Williams asked about the case of a complaint about the IRE president or executive director. Gabler said that's why it's important to have at least two people weighing in; language should be added to say that the board president will be involved in the investigation "unless a conflict of interest exists." Haddix said if there's a complaint against him, the MU dean and board president would oversee the investigation into that, since he's technically a university employee.

Gabler: For real-time complaints, the current policy says complaints at the conference are handled by the executive director. Suggestion for change is that executive director "will" run it by president or member of executive committee, not "may" run it by, for the same purpose of having two people present.

Zurik asked why guideline document isn't published for all members; Branstetter said not all IRE policies are made public. She suggested taking off "For internal use only" at top of document.

Miller asked about the division of responsibility between board and executive director. Haddix said after speaking with legal expert, determined complaints about members should be handled by board, as volunteers. Executive director's job is to handle complaints about staff.

Williams asked if something should be added to specify that complaints against executive director will be handled by the board director; Gabler and others said probably not, because it will never cover every possibility. Haddix said legal advice was that a more specific policy was actually more legally vulnerable.

Haddix suggested adding language into real-time complaints about conflicts of interest, such as that exists in the other complaints section. Miller asked about an option for anonymous complaints; Haddix said lawyer advised against that.

Goldberg asks that Haddix clean up the document and send it by email; Vap thanked Gabler for her work on this.

Quick break; Goldberg resumes meeting at 3:20 p.m.

### **NICAR/IRE conference city possibilities — Stephanie Klimstra**

Klimstra: Conferences booked for IRE: 2019 Houston, 2020 DC, 2021 Indianapolis, 2025 New Orleans, 2027 Phoenix. 2022 hasn't been booked and is most critical; economy and booking hotels are tight. Looking at going to the West, but that's been challenging; most of those are outside our price range. San Francisco, San Diego are too expensive. Talking with Anaheim, could be a possibility, but might not be able to go to West Coast until we can go up to another price tier.

CAR conference: we take a lot of space, but about half the number of sleeping rooms compared to IRE. Nothing is booked after Newport Beach in 2019. For 2020, New Orleans is a good option; \$229 for week after Mardi Gras. 2021 has a good proposal from Baltimore; \$199.

Zurik asked about details of food/drink costs; Klimstra said those go toward receptions, luncheon, and is an item that can be discussed conference by conference at the September retreat. Coffee is really expensive, \$125 per gallon.

General board consensus of approval of New Orleans and Baltimore for future NICAR conferences.

## **Informational Items**

### **Conference Committee — Thompson and Vap**

Vap thanked board for additional input and help this year compared to previous years. Thompson thanked staff for working to ensure diverse panels.

Thompson brought up technology issue Thursday morning; this was also a problem last year. Zurik said there were issues with sound in Crystal rooms crossing over, major technology issues. Staff were tremendous and jumped in, responsive and helpful, but the issues are embarrassing for our organization; with second panel in Crystal, audio and Powerpoints wouldn't work. Would like outreach from IRE apologizing to the high-level speakers involved with the broadcast panel (Raycom, Tegna, Knight). For fall retreat, would like a plan to ensure this doesn't happen again, wants more testing on hotel's part.

Klimstra said regardless of how much prep goes into tech, unforeseen issues happen. Everything was tested this morning by the hotel and Marc Emerson. General manager said in nine years of this hotel, it's never happened before with the split ballroom issues. Everything worked when they tested this morning, but then when all the panels started, essentially a fuse blew. They were trying to patch things together and couldn't fully fix it until lunch. Hotel is refunding costs, and putting AV people in each room for the rest of the weekend.

Zurik said in the fall, he'd like to know more about the testing procedures, what they're testing, if they're testing multiple rooms at the same time.

Klimstra said all hotel tech are outsourced; they give post-event and pre-event reports to the past and future hotels. Branstetter suggested outreach/saying something to acknowledge the tech problems and let members know. Vap said we should write a blog post on the website and let them know what Marriott has done.

Riepenhoff asked about long registration lines. Klimstra said not as many people showed up Wednesday, and it's hard to know when people will arrive. Klimstra said we're thinking about doing automated name tags for future years, where people scan a code to print their own name tags.

Cohen asked about sponsorship of panels and how that works. Also asked about track names; "diversity track" hits some people the wrong way. At NICAR conference, there are lots of people who have nothing to do with journalism; former journalists, work for government, not current or former members. Does it risk becoming a tech conference rather than a journalism conference? How much do we want people to be on panels if they're not eligible to be members? Haddix said we don't approve memberships for people who don't meet the membership standards. Williams asked that this be an item of discussion on the fall retreat agenda.

Branstetter said master classes have been great, should be expanded and maybe price raised. Vap suggested selling videos for the master classes that have high demand.

### **IRE staff reports (highlights) — Doug Haddix**

Held a full staff retreat last fall for the first time in at least 8 years. Four new employees last year, great way to all get together, bond, start working on new structure.

In next fiscal year, there will be 17 watchdog workshops instead of ten. Four with Reveal and CIR; three through grant with Knight Foundation for TV workshops. Quite a bit more work for training staff, Stephanie and logistics.

Fundraising: received three-year Knight Foundation grant, which secures \$630,000 over three years, stable, reliable funding. Vachon has helped tremendously and has been here less than a year. End-of-year fundraising campaign has gone up each year the past few years. At first they thought it was a Trump Bump in 2016, but last year still went up. Last fall used Facebook on the Day of Giving, which was really helpful; they matched dollar per dollar up to \$3,000.

Looking at partnerships, Vachon looks at large donors through communities we're holding workshops in and reaches out to them to see if they want coffee or a drink with the trainer who's there. Cody Winchester tried this in Portland and it went well.

Huge DC watchdog workshop this spring with 201 people; Vachon lined up three days' worth of meetings for herself and Haddix with donors, foundations, other journalists. During this Orlando conference, Haddix, Vachon and others are having a series of meetings with current and potential new funders.

Williams asked about plan for estate planning, "keep IRE in mind." Haddix said he and Vachon have list of things to bring to new endowment committee, including that.

Membership: set record high of 5,941 members at end of May. About 5,650 right now; depends on how many people register on site in Orlando. Up 3% over last year in membership. Cohen asked about demographic survey; Goldberg said we can't do it until the new website, lots of information missing right now. Haddix said new website launch is planned for July or August. Demographics have also been added to speaker form, which will help create a baseline to compare future conferences.

Conference attendance around 1,730 — third-largest IRE conference in IRE history. If we top 1,805 from Philadelphia a few years ago, we'll be the second-largest. Branstetter asked about the hotel booking up earlier than usual; Haddix said slightly, there were other large citywide conferences.

Training: Broadcast workshops kick off this fall. As part of Knight grant, we have funding to send a trainer to three additional conferences every year where there are significant broadcast attendance. Building on partnerships with NABJ, NAHJ, NLGJA with trainings at their conferences.

Gabler suggested putting diversity-related efforts on IRE website to refer people to when they ask about partnerships with organizations like NABJ, NAHJ.

Zurik said he appreciates the discussion of broadcast workshops with the broadcasters on the board. Suggested strategic outreach to ensure that attendance is high. Haddix asked for any contacts or emails to add to his information on that.

Three on-the-road data boot camps this fall; one in Indianapolis, Winchester will lead Python boot camp in Pittsburgh, Charles Minshew will lead R boot camp in Chicago. Have been working to secure partnerships for those, and have secured some funding for scholarships as well.

Thompson asked about conference attendee diversity; Haddix said we don't know, because it's self-reported and we don't know most people's ethnicity. Ten Ida B. Wells fellows are here and had a gathering Thursday morning. Branstetter said there are nine Reveal diversity fellows here, too. Cohen suggested a blog post of diversity efforts/gatherings at the conference.

Cohen said data services has always been a budget issue; it's important but doesn't make much money. Suggested following AP's model with data.world; looking into whether putting some of our data sets on that platform. Minshew said he has a monthly call with data.world and they've had discussions.

Minshew talked about data archiving, boxes and boxes of discs in IRE offices. Google spreadsheet with catalog of 3,500 discs and everything the data library has touched; it's stored with MU archives. He wants to publish that list for members so they can request old data sets.

#### **Board president — Matt Goldberg**

Staff is working hard and is maxed out. Adding programs and services takes money; they can't do more, and it means we need a larger staff. Board candidates bring ideas, and that's great, but there has to be a backing behind it. Our role as board members is to go find money for the organization; more money means we can do more for the members.

#### **Audit Committee report — Sarah Cohen**

Clean audit, everything looks good. A couple management letters, but everything was addressed and look good. Auditor brought up issue about new requirements for nonprofits in reporting audited financial results, in order to get audited beginning next year. Requires a huge amount of work from staff; going through every piece of revenue we get and how we account for it. Wanted to make sure board is aware of this; auditors wanted a plan on how we're going to get this done. This shouldn't change financials in any way; it's a new way of documenting our reporting. Haddix said if Henry needs a part-time person to help with this for a few months, they will make that happen.

#### **Contest Committee — Jill Riepenhoff**

All recommendations can be discussed at the retreat. Super screener model worked great this year; problems with one category, but that's it. Super screeners got things in early, released entries early, huge improvement.

On budget, seems like we spent more on contests, a few reasons for that: Added a couple extra judges this year. Somebody didn't book a plane ticket until the last minute, cost \$1,000 for IRE. Will change reimbursement process; they will go through Stephanie if they're seeking reimbursement. We were in Columbus instead of Columbia this year because of timing of Easter, holidays, spring break. No reason for us to go to Columbia in spring break. Next year is same situation. She suggests going back to Columbia; even if students aren't there, put a professor on the contest committee, getting MU involved.

Miller brought up reducing entries from screeners from five to three, limiting length of entries. Riepenhoff said that should be discussed because of workload on judges. Also suggests written expectations for contest committee judges; a judge called a contestant this year and asked them a question, but the contestant entry wasn't named a finalist. It's inappropriate for a judge to contact a contestant.

#### **Endowment Committee** — Andy Donohue (via phone)

Endowment is the same as last few years; on pace to earn same, between \$160,000 to \$170,000, as seen in budget. Would pull some of those earnings to help augment budget, and invest the rest back into the endowment. Good history in report from Brant Houston. Named new members of committee going forward.

Things being discussed: Is it time to launch another endowment drive? Pros and cons; if you raise millions, you're focusing on that rather than raising for annual budget, or a new initiative. Endowment is focused on smaller returns from the large endowment, a slow, steady stream.

Should reserve funds be invested? Sent note from discussion in 2015; spent time looking at that a few years ago, but it's been brought up again recently. Estate planning has percolated on and off for a while; if we want to do it, we should bring up a more structured way of diving into it. Have discussed having someone come in to analyze our investment strategy; the committee can dive into that over the year. Also some cleaning up of bylaws language; refer to an endowment "fund" but we have multiple funds.

#### **Member Services Committee** — Lee Zurik

At Saturday luncheon, all funds raised will go to diversity scholarships for next year's conference. Staff picked the speaker to raise support for that, thinks she'll do a good job. Emphasized importance of student sponsorship program and what it does for the organization. Gabler said that program has been turned over to IRE staff.

**Public Engagement Committee** — Phil Williams

Giving second Don Bolles medal to two from Reuters; committee felt that was the obvious choice. Didn't get much input from our members, had reached out to other organizations like CPJ for recommendations. Wants to get more input from members for potential nominees next year.

Cohen and Branstetter said the board had agreed to not do it every year and decide whether the potential nominees deserved award.

**Board president** — Matt Goldberg

Recognized 22 years of service collectively from Gabler, Donohue, Cohen. Presented service awards for their impact on the organization.

There's an election coming up; asked that anyone declare intentions for the executive committee.

Gabler moved to adjourn at 4:47 p.m., Cohen seconded.