

**2016 IRE Board Retreat
St. Louis, MO
September 9, 2016**

In Attendance: Ziva Branstetter, Sarah Cohen, Andrew Donohue, Ellen Gabler, Matt Goldberg, T. Christian Miller (arrived at 1:17 p.m.), Steven Rich, Jill Riepenhoff, Cheryl W. Thompson, Nicole Vap, Phil Williams, Lee Zurik, Josh Meyer (via phone)

Staff in Attendance: Mark Horvit and Stephanie Sinn (arrived mid-meeting), Amy Johnston (arrived mid-meeting)

Meeting called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Goldberg

Previous minutes

Branstetter makes motion to approve June minutes. Unanimous approval.

Executive Director Report – Horvit

Membership – Membership started the month at 5,400. This is ahead of where we have been for the past several years.

Training - We did a couple of recent watchdogs, and attendance was good. We are doing a lot of custom training in broadcast. We are doing a project with TEGNA in Houston, which might turn into something long-term.

Conference fundraising - Gannett is in to be the co-host for Phoenix and may do the whole thing. NBC is a sponsor for the luncheon and Raycom is also committed. We are working with Knight to renew a conference support grant. The Jacksonville paper looking at some sort of support for NICAR, likely a co-host. Horvit is contacting the Tampa Times to see if there is interest in supporting or co-hosting.

Riepenhoff suggested contacting Gatehouse for both conferences

Horvit listed other backers for the conference, which include Bloomberg, etc., and said we are off to a strong start in conference fundraising.

Web site redesign - Stephanie Sinn and Sarah Hutchins are working on two different parts of the planning process. Sarah has interviewed everyone on staff to see what they would like to have in a redesigned site. The aim is to make the site easier to navigate and to better integrate the membership side.

Arizona Project - Our lawyer is continuing to work with their lawyer. We have split the fees over two years. Once we sign the contract we get \$35,000, which should more than cover all of our legal costs. If production of the movie starts, IRE will end up with about \$400,000. Horvit suggests that the money go into the general endowment if that occurs.

Resource Center - New students are being trained to provide research support for some news organizations. Have been working with Reuters, talking to WSJ and maybe some freelancers. Horvit thinks this could be a good and new revenue stream.

Data Library - IRE announced this week that the Data library has a new data set – college scorecard. Sixty or 70 people downloaded it. One found a mistake. Sent an email to everyone who downloaded it. So far, no problems have been reported.

BUDGET – Horvit

Expenses were higher than expected at the conference, but this was more than offset by higher revenues, meaning we still were well ahead of budget. There are several factors, all centered on the fact that conference attendance has grown, such as added rooms and computers. We also upgraded all the computers this year to make the hands on sessions go better, which they did. Another cost was adding the Knight Fellow costs to the budget – that was \$40,000 which we did not use to include under conference expenses, but which we really should. The final budget was adjusted to reflect these changes.

Zurik asked about the breakdown in conference fundraising between conferences. Horvit said that \$80,000-\$110,000 is NICAR, the rest is IRE. Fundraising has traditionally been easier for IRE because it's a bigger event with a broader focus, but that there is an opportunity to raise more for NICAR.

Williams made a motion to adopt the changes to the budget. Cohen seconded. Passed unanimously.

Endowment and Reserve Fund – Horvit

Not much had changed. The more money we can leave in the endowment, the better. There's a new line item for the FOI fund. They have started to invest that. Because IRE had a strong year, we were able to move \$200,000 into the reserve. We still have \$90,000 in cash available.

Cohen asked about moving the NICAR conference to earlier in the year, but cautioned that there were problems with that – elections, etc.

Donohue asked what the plans were for the \$90,000 and if it will be spent in the budget. Horvit said he thinks it's important to keep that cash on hand and available if needs arise.

Zurik asked what the minimum amount of cash on hand should be. Horvit said he's tried to keep around that amount and noted that the last time there was extra cash on hand, he combined some available cash with grant money and added the third trainer.

Donohue noted that the next director will take over a budget that has almost fully funded reserves, which he said is a great testament to Horvit. Horvit said he did not think IRE would get close to the \$600,000 reserve fund goal this quickly.

Donohue said the board had considered whether should be investing our reserves. We decided not to because it's too risky.

Contest committee update - Riepenhoff

There are a few things that came up from last year's judging. One issue the Contest Committee discussed was adding more description to the innovations in investigative reporting category.

Riepenhoff also talked about limiting the number of names entered with an entry to five. She noted that some news organizations include a lengthy list of contributors.

Cohen said that another challenge is that despite that, some people are left out.

Riepenhoff said Pulitzer limits to it to five and Sigma Delta Chi limits the number at three. Goldberg asked if all the names could be listed somewhere. Horvit said listing all of the names of those involved is something that people like about IRE, that it lets people who often don't get recognition have their contributions recognized.

Branstetter said the big problem is at the luncheon, when all the names must be read aloud. Horvit said we could just change it so that if there are more than five names for a winner, the presenter on the video doesn't read all the names, but simply says the name of the organization. But the names could be on the slide.

The board agreed with that approach.

Riepenhoff said that Contest Committee member Jim Polk wanted to add a category for international reporting. Riepenhoff went back through the winners and finalists from 2011 and found that multiple international organizations have won awards. She said the committee overall did not support the idea. No action was taken.

Riepenhoff said there was some confusion among the judges with the FOIA award, asking whether the award focuses on the fight for open records or the results from prying records loose. Cohen asked how we can clarify. Riepenhoff said she just wanted to make sure how we collectively interpret it – so we know that it's about furthering open records. The consensus was that both factors matter, though the fight is particularly important, given that most IRE entries involve obtaining records.

Riepenhoff said one final issue the committee raised was the number of finalists. Screeners are instructed to send up to five entries. Horvit said that there is an expectation among screeners that if they put someone forward as a finalist, that entry will remain a finalist, unless a problem is discovered with the entry.

Cohen said the screeners were sometimes sending stories through as finalists that did not deserve it. Cohen said she thought we could tell the screeners they don't have to send five to the judges. This is already the case, but Zurik said it should just be better communicated. Gabler said there should be a team captain on each screening committee that can make sure everyone knows the expectations.

Meeting adjourned for a 10-minute break.

Upcoming Conferences – Horvit & Sinn

2019 CAR - Location options for the 2019 CAR conference are Anaheim and Newport, both in California. Horvit said Sinn did an amazing job with the negotiations for both of these to get good deals and make them affordable for IRE and our members.

As discussed at the June meeting, the Anaheim hotel is the Hyatt Regency Orange County and the room rate that hotel is \$195. The other hotel is the Newport Beach Marriott and the rate there is \$204.

Zurik asked how far away the airports are. Several of the board named airports that are located nearby. Sinn noted that Newport has more food and entertainment options.

Sinn went on to discuss some of the fees the hotel waived.

Miller asked if there was a strong argument for Anaheim. Several noted that Disney is close to Anaheim.

A motion was made by Cohen to go with the Newport Beach Marriott. Miller seconded the motion. Unanimous approval.

2018 IRE Conference - We wanted to try and move toward the east coast for 2018. Horvit noted that Sinn had some concerns about the hotel we were looking at in Washington, D.C. Staff is recommending Atlanta or Orlando instead. Sinn said that the hotel options would be the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Atlanta or the Renaissance Hotel in Orlando. She also noted that both are hotels we have been to previously.

Donohue asked if there was any advantage of having a list of specific cities that we could go to on rotation every few years. Sinn said that she does have a list that she uses to narrow things down. She also noted that we could have 4-5 cities where we know we fit that we could rotate. Goldberg asked why we haven't done that before. Horvit said that we in the past we have tried to get to as many different communities as possible, and the funding has been an issue when looking at going back to a location too quickly.

Horvit said we have to get 2018 lined up as soon as possible. A down side of going to Orlando in 2018 is that we are going to be in Jacksonville this coming year and it could be an issue to get funding.

Donohue said that he thought there are several that didn't think Orlando would be good.

Williams said that his memory of Atlanta was that the space was split. He asked Sinn if with a bigger conference if there would be a problem. Sinn said that we would be split but she didn't have specific details. She also noted that there isn't any way that we could be in a hotel that would have all of our space on one floor.

Conference Fees - We have been slowly increasing the conference registration fees but as the conference grows and we add more things, we need to look at pricing. We equalized the rates between the conferences a couple of years ago. The rates for both conferences are \$260 for early-bird, \$290 for regular and \$320 on-site.

Horvit suggested that we raise the rates by \$25, which would make the rates \$285 for early-bird, \$315 for regular and \$345 for on-site.

Donohue noted that we have one of the least expensive registration fees.

Cohen asked what the student registration fee is. Horvit replied that its \$100 and it hasn't been raised.

Cohn asked if it was worth it to raise the rate by \$25. Horvit replied that it would be good for IRE financially. Donohue asked what the numbers were behind the rate of \$25. Horvit replied that it's a 7 percent raise and that he thought it was a reasonable amount that will still give us some wiggle room.

Branstetter made the motion to raise the conference registration rate by \$25. Motion was seconded by Goldberg. Unanimously approved.

Horvit asked if the board felt there needed to be a change to the student rate. Everyone agreed that it should remain the same and students should still be able to renew their membership at the student rate for up to three years after graduating.

Keynote

Horvit asked for ideas about keynote speakers for IRE 2017.

Cohen asked about Nikole Hannah Jones from last year.

Vap asked about Lester Holt. Goldberg responded that the problem with someone in a national anchor position is that if there is breaking news, we could lose them at the last minute.

Discussion ensued with a variety of names. After some discussion Goldberg noted that in the past we did a ranking list and he thought it would be good to do that again.

Vap said she like the idea of Jorge Ramos. Horvit asked Thompson to reach out and see if he would be open for a high profile speaking spot, whether keynote or showcase.

Donohue said he thought it was better when it's an actual reporter rather than a celebrity, someone who is in the trenches, rather than someone who isn't.

Horvit reminded them that if they didn't want to make a decision today, then they would need to do something within the next week or two.

Ida B. Wells Society – Goldberg/Horvit

Goldberg said the Ida B. Well Society is a nonprofit that was founded by several current IRE members and a former employee. Their mission is directly in line with IRE and it would be good if we could foster and grow the relationship between them and IRE. They have also made it clear they aren't trying to compete with IRE.

Horvit said he had talked with Nikole Hannah Jones and Ron Nixon about a lot of different things including why they chose to do this separately from IRE. One of the reasons that they cited is because they believe it is important for an organization focusing on the involvement of people of color in investigative reporting to be led by journalists of color.

Among some of the things we have already agreed to do with them is to send trainers to a couple of their events. They have agreed to put together panel session for the 2017 IRE Conference.

Horvit said that we don't want this to turn into a competition, and as Goldberg said, their goals align with IRE's goals.

Another thing we discussed is whether or not we should try and apply for some grants together. Cohen asked if there was an opportunity to cross membership with them. Horvit replied that we have to be careful to make sure their membership rules mirror and that would be something we would have to look at.

Williams noted that the Watchdog Workshops include membership and asked if that would be included in these trainings. Horvit said that we will sometimes do memberships with the trainings.

Goldberg said that as board members he hoped everyone was trying to find ways to add diversity to the IRE work that they do, whether it be training, outreach or speaking.

Gabler said that something that membership committee has tried in the past is to get schools to commit to sending students to the conferences, and as part of that we would ask them to select diverse student. This worked well for the CAR conference but not so well for IRE, since it was during the summer.

Data Library – Horvit

Liz Lucas accepted another job and has left the position of Data Library Director. I would like to start advertising that position as soon as possible. Once the new executive director has started he or she can make the final decision on whom to hire. I have already cleared everything through the university and Jaimi Dowdell has looked over the job description.

Horvit note that this position is too important of a job to wait on beginning the search process. He also noted that we have a number of students currently working in the Data Library who need direction and leadership.

Cohen asked what would happen if the new executive director wants to change the job description. Horvit replied that the position's description is set to some extent, because IRE's contract with the

university calls for running the data library as a training center for students. However, other aspects of the job could be modified or changed.

Horvit asked if the board was OK with moving forward with this. Everyone agreed.

DocumentCloud - Horvit

We did get an extension and the grant is now good through early spring. Horvit said he has been in contact with the Knight Foundation and shared plans to roll out a pay version of the site. He stressed that there isn't any way the journalism community will pay enough to keep this going by itself. If a lot of our international community continues to grow, that would help.

Williams asked if there was a marketing plan. Horvit said that we don't have money built in for marketing. To market it we will have to get another grant. If our current user base can generate some money that will be a compelling argument to get more money to market it.

Miller said that we could be a victim of our own success. The more it's known outside of the industry, the more that other companies could come in and do their own thing that is similar.

Horvit said another key discussion for the board will be to determine what IRE wants to do with DocumentCloud in the future. Horvit said that decision will need to be made with the next executive director, but said he would be willing to stay involved with the process through the end of the current grant.

Executive Director Transition

The meeting went into closed session at 3:55 p.m. to discuss the executive director transition. Meeting resumed open session at 4:02 p.m.

Horvit noted that when he started as director there were weekly meetings with the executive committee, and while it was a lot, it was very helpful. He recommended that the executive committee do a phone meeting a couple of times a month to check in. He also said he was happy to help the new director as much as he could.

Horvit also said the board had previously been more involved in the planning of the conferences. While we have a great staff, having the board help can be very beneficial.

Goldberg said that everyone on the board has taken on committee positions and now is the time to step up. He told board members that if they chair a committee, have a meeting and talk about what we can do. Goldberg also encouraged other board members to plan a visit to Columbia and touch base with the staff. He said it had been helpful to him to meet with the staff and get a better understanding of things.

Horvit had to leave the meeting at 4:09 p.m. Before leaving Horvit thanked the board for everything. The board gave Horvit a standing ovation.

Don Bolles Award - Williams

Williams said that those were not part of the original conversation. He had previously proposed this award for a couple of different reasons.

Williams went on to talk about how much IRE has meant to him and IRE's unique back story. He went on to say that we probably have a number of members that don't realize what the history of the organization is and how inspiring it is. Especially in a time when journalists are under attack.

Proposal – Don Bolles Award for Journalistic Courage: Recognizes investigative journalists or their news organizations who, in the spirit of Don Bolles, have exhibited extraordinary courage in standing up against intimidation and/or efforts to suppress the truth about matters of public importance.

This would give IRE one big award that we can do every year that can give someone support. It would be an annual award, if there is someone that is worthy. If there are two people, we could also do that.

Some of examples of journalists who could have been considered: New York Times reporter, Jim Risen, Fox News reporter James Rosen, Azerbaijani journalists, Khadija Rovshan, and Fox News reporter Jana Winter.

Williams said he thought the reason to make this decision now is because there isn't a better time to launch this than at the Phoenix conference next year.

Goldberg asked if it would be a board decision. Cohen noted that it would be more like the Founders award. Gabler asked when the Founders award started. Cohen responded that it started about 5 years ago and we've only given it out once. Donohue asked if this would be awarded every year.

Cohen said that one of the things they had previously discussed as a concern was that, looking internationally, problems like Risen's pale in comparison to what a journalist face in a country where violence against journalists is a constant threat.

Williams said this an opportunity for the organization to make a statement.

Cohen suggested that they remove the word courageous. Williams said he thought the engagement committee could take a look at that. Cohen said that the word courage is a stumbling block for her.

Branstetter said she thought they should try it because Phoenix would be the perfect time and that they could always refine it later.

Zurik said that he thought changing the wording a bit would make a difference. Goldberg asked if it had to be an annual award or just when the occasion arises. It makes it that much more important if you aren't giving it out every year. Williams said it would be awarded annually at the discretion of the board.

Branstetter said she supports the idea that news organizations could be considered.

Goldberg said that it sounded like there was a lot of positive feedback and that it would need to be sent to the engagement committee to come up with some final wording and a formal name, so that it could be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Cohen said she thought they should wait until the new executive director started to discuss marketing. Discussion ensued on how to market the award.

Williams made a motion to refer the Don Bolles award to the public engagement committee to formalize and finalize the title and description. Vap seconded the motion. Unanimous approval.

New Business - Goldberg

No new business

Goldberg made the motion to adjourn. Motion seconded by Gabler. Unanimous approval